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I LIVED WITH GORILLA



JÉUAN DU BERRIE



I LIVED WITH GORILLA

By

JÉUAN DU BERRIE

M.B., A.M.T., F.Z.S.

With thirteen Illustrations

LONDON

STANLEY PAUL & CO. LTD.



Made and Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.
1938

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I LIVED WITH GORILLA

CHAPTER I

THE CALL OF THE WILD

SOME men find friends amongst men, some amongst animals. I must confess that the society of my fellow-men has never counted for much with me ; I have found my chief happiness and solace in the companionship of the creatures of the wild. It was in the wilds of Central Africa that I found my greatest and most faithful friends, the Kings of the Forest, the mighty Gorilla.

Naked and alone I met the great anthropoids in their haunts in the depths of tropical Africa. I played with them and talked their language and they accepted me as one of themselves. One huge ape, the truest friend that man could ever have, stood by my side throughout my sojourn in the forest and even fought two mighty battles on my behalf.

Sitting in my room in the heart of London I hear the cry of my chimpanzees, and that cry takes me back at once to those beloved Gorilla friends of mine. And I long again for the hot,

steamy forest, for the thrill of ever-present danger, for the warm affection of those kindly friends. The most extraordinary experience known to man has left me unreconciled to the company of my fellow-humans ; one of my favourite occupations is to live over again my happy days in the dense African jungle.

I have always loved all living creatures, and they in their turn have always loved me. By means of some unaccountable instinct I am able to exert a sort of charm or mesmerism over them, and never once in my life have I been mauled or bitten by any animal, except in play. I bear on my body the marks of many teeth, but they are the scars of friendly nips ; my Gorilla playmates, though they were boisterous, never intended me any harm.

My early life gave me ample opportunities for indulging this love for all kinds of wild things. I lived at Isola in Malta, where my father was Consul for eighteen years, and I spent my childhood surrounded by every sort of bird and beast. My father was a well-known naturalist, and when he found that my whole interest was bound up in the study of animals he encouraged me and taught me all he knew himself. "Jéuan," he used to say, "if you want to know what causes animals to act in the way that they do, you must know what goes on inside them." So he taught me to dissect animals and birds and to understand their reactions.

Gradually all the people on the Island came to know of my intense interest, and sailors from the

port of Valetta would bring me their ships' pets, chimpanzees, baboons, and even gorilla, until I had a veritable zoo on the terrace of the house. Monkeys of all kinds were my particular concern, and at one time I had as many as thirty chimpanzees in my zoo. I used to encourage two of the friendliest of them to climb through my bedroom window at night and talk to me in their own language, something between a bark and a cluck uttered far down in the throat, until we all understood each other perfectly. And all the time, as I played with my hairy friends, I was longing for the day when I could speak to their brothers in the freedom of their native haunts instead of in the degradation of captivity. Even as a little child this wanderlust took hold of me, this yearning to visit the jungle homes of wild animals. It was fostered by a strange incident which happened to me when I was in my teens.

A grizzly bear was the chief actor in this drama. He was the size of a small terrier dog when he was given to me by some sailors, but he grew and grew until eventually he weighed close on 400 lbs. When he was still a little furry cub, his brown coat not yet tipped with grey, I used to pour condensed milk over my foot, and the bear would suck it to get the necessary nutriment. He was very fond of me, and used to carry me about under his arms, never making any attempt to hug me.

It so happened, however, that the Army and Navy sports were being held at Corridina, near Isola. Whether the noise and music and lights

frightened the Grizzly, or whether all at once he rebelled against captivity I do not know. But suddenly he went berserk, picked me up and tucked me under his arm, and carried me off into the woods. There I lived for three days, with only my furry friend for company, until a search party arrived, headed by my anxious father. Fearful of what would happen if they tried to take me away from my savage guardian, and knowing that the Grizzly is one of the most ferocious of all beasts, my father was forced to shoot the bear, and my loving friend was no more.

This brief sojourn in the woods fired my imagination. I longed to make an even closer acquaintance with animals living in their wild state. I longed to visit the distant jungles of Africa and live as the beasts lived, far removed from all civilisation. Often after that I would run away from home, or play truant from the Monastery of San Dominico, where I was at school, to hide in the country or in the forest caves. There I would pretend that I was in the jungle. The question of food never worried me, and many times I would remain for days on end in the seclusion of a hollow cave or tree, studying animal life. On some occasions, indeed, I stayed for so long a time in one position, absorbed in the sights that met my eager eyes, that when I came to get up I was quite unable to move my numbed limbs.

At first my father grew worried at my continual absences, and search-parties were always arriving and disturbing my solitude. But eventually it

was borne in upon him that I always turned up in the end ; and realising my inveterate dislike for human beings and my extreme love for animals he decided to leave me to my own devices.

There was always so much to occupy my attention in Malta. Innumerable birds visited the island : wild swans, who flew over with outstretched necks, uttering their mournful, honking cry ; egrets, peewits, quail, snipe, landrails and corncrakes. There have been times when I have had as many as sixteen snowy owls in my bedroom, hooting and circling round, and catching morsels of raw meat as I threw them. A tame hawk, too, was for a time my constant companion, and although untrained for the chase it used to come to my call and eat food from my hand.

Storks, with their long, brittle-looking legs and pointed beaks, have always fascinated me. I was anxious to keep one as a pet, and at length my father procured six of them for me. After a time, however, he became afraid. Storks are peculiarly attracted by any brightly-shining object, and there was a danger that they might peck out my eyes. So they were allowed to fly away.

I still believe that those storks would not have hurt me. I have never been able satisfactorily to account for my power over animals, but it definitely exists, and was later to be proved when I lived unscathed among my Gorilla friends. At the age of three I had my first experience of it. Looking one day from my nursery window, I saw the servants dragging in a lean and savage Russian

timber wolf. My father was making experiments in the inter-breeding of animals at the time, and this wolf was to be used in an attempt to strengthen his strain of dogs. He had never intended it to be used as a source of cruel amusement to the servants. The four men tied it up to a stake in the centre of the courtyard and began to goad it with poles until it was a grinning personification of hate. Young as I was, my heart went out to the beast, but I was soon pulled away from the window by my nurse and put to bed.

As soon as the house was quiet I scrambled from my bed and made a stealthy descent of the staircase into the courtyard, where the tortured wolf was still prowling up and down the length of the chain. As I approached him he snarled and slunk back. Still I followed him, and patted his head and laid my hand on the fierce black jaw. He might easily have buried his long teeth in my flesh, but instead he sat back on his haunches and after a few suspicious sniffs licked my hand. We played together as I should have played with one of my father's dogs, for I had no fear of the Killer Wolf and found him an excellent companion. When we were tired we lay down together and went to sleep. From that experience came my feeling of close affinity with the animal world.

The feeling returned a few years later, when I was eleven. I had been given an *Once*, or snow leopard, from one of the freight boats. "Don't let it out," said my father. "*Onces* are fierce brutes, and it may do some damage." But the

beautiful cream-coloured creature seemed very docile to me, and as I stroked it between the bars of the cage it purred beneath my hand like a large cat. One day, in defiance of my father's instructions, I opened the cage. For a moment the leopard hesitated, feeling my fondling hand and never attempting to bite me. Then it suddenly arched its sinuous back and sprang out of the window. As my father had predicted, it was responsible for a vast amount of damage to the livestock and it also seriously injured some of the servants when they attempted to catch it. Eventually it had to be shot. For days I cried and refused to be comforted: this fierce animal, which had tasted human blood before it died, had never attempted to hurt me; it had never bitten my fingers as I caressed the savage jaw.

But even the many presents from the sailors were not enough to satisfy me. I was always devising means of getting animals, animals and yet more animals. I would go down to the market place at Bormla and buy all sorts of creatures, chiefly monkeys when I could get them, to replenish my zoo. Once I remember buying a goat. It was a smelly beast and absolutely refused to walk home. Nothing daunted, I decided to carry it, and this I did, in stages, for the whole of the four miles between Bormla and Isola.

It so happened that my father was walking along the road with a friend. Seeing the strange object approaching, he turned to his companion with a laugh.

"I bet you I know who is behind that goat."

"Why, who do you think it is?" asked his friend.

"I don't think, I *know*," answered he. "There is only one person in Malta who would carry a stinking goat along the road, and that is my little boy Jéuan."

When he could get away from Isola, my father used to take me up to his shooting-box in the country. He was a remarkable shot, and often in the queer half-light of dawn, waiting for the game to fly over, he would wing a bird instead of killing it, so that I could have it for a pet. Such sport has never appealed to me, and I have never shot anything in my life, except during the War, when I shot men. Man has no right to kill. Everything has its place on earth and its hour when the clock strikes: and for man to move forward the hands of that clock and end a life before the hour has struck is to me a crime worthy of the greatest retribution.

Many times I used to carry bleeding and dying birds in my hands for hours, and put them in my bed and sleep with them. Sickly pups, too, I would take from the bitch and lay between my blankets. My father objected to this practice because of the fleas, but he was never able to break me of the habit.

Malta is a beautiful place, and to a boy as young and impressionable as myself it seemed a veritable fairyland. There are flowers everywhere—jessamine, roses and pinks, which fill the whole

island with the sweetness of their scent from the first of May to late Autumn. "May! how it smells!" is a favourite saying among the natives.

The nights too have to be seen to be believed. There is no twilight, and as soon as the sun sinks darkness falls. The low skies, dark blue and sprinkled with myriads of winking stars, seem almost to touch the earth. The moon splashes a shining path on the sea. And over the still water comes the murmur of voices and the soft strumming of a guitar or mandolin: a gondolier serenading his lady. Once a year, at the time of *carnival*, the whole island becomes one gigantic masked ball. The streets are lit with hanging oil-lamps that conjure up innumerable flickering shadows from the dark corners, and the people parade them, wearing masks or animal faces and throwing sweets and confetti. At night the proceedings are concluded with a grand firework display. The glamour of it all used to go to my head like wine; I felt as though I were living in the land of the Arabian Nights.

Even the ordinary life of every day had its excitements. Murders were frequent, and occurred chiefly for the following reason. The usual means of conveyance about the island was a sort of horse-drawn vehicle somewhat resembling a cab covered with an awning. But during 1904 tramcars were introduced, and for a long time afterwards we were either seeing or hearing of murdered tram-drivers, killed by the cabmen for taking away their trade.

As I look back I realise how full and happy my boyhood was. There was so much to interest me, so much to do every day. My father gave me everything that I wished for, and I had my devoted pets for companionship. Yet as I grew older these things contented me less. One idea obsessed me and filled my mind to the exclusion of all else : a visit to the land of the Gorilla. It was my one overwhelming ambition, the one dream which haunted me day and night. I owned four of the great beasts while I was still young, and my love for them was very great. But they had never grown to their full extent, and I knew that the Gorilla in captivity was very different from the enormous animal which had earned for himself the proud title of " The King of the Forest." I longed for the sight of him in his native state.

As I talked to my captive monkey friends I yearned to go out to the jungle. When I went fishing in my little *dyso* boat I thought of the ship which would one day surely carry me over the sea to Africa. I bought beer for the sailors who came ashore from the freight boats, and plied them with it endlessly, to make them tell me tales of the Gaboon country. Daily my imagination was fired with their lurid stories. As I grew in years my ambition and my wanderlust grew with me, until suddenly one day I made up my mind. Nothing should shake me from my purpose. Before another month had passed I would go to the land of the Gorilla.

CHAPTER II

I BEGIN MY FOREST LIFE

I WAS just nineteen years old when I persuaded the captain of a trading vessel to take me to the land of the Gorilla. At first he was reluctant, not liking the idea of depositing me on a deserted stretch of the African coast, which was what I had asked him to do. But money will work wonders on reluctance, and with a bribe of £30 I was able to remove the first obstacle that stood in the way of my life's ambition.

My parents had raised no real objections when I told them a few days previously that I was about to set forth on my travels. They knew only too well that the wanderlust was an incurable disease and must have its way. So when at last the freighter steamed slowly away from Valetta, bearing me with it, they were on the quayside waving good-bye. We all felt a little sad, not knowing when we would see each other again.

I had signed on as a member of the ship's crew, but as the captain refused to let me do any work I became a sort of ship's doctor. I had always been interested in surgery, although before I had dealt only with animals. Now I was called upon to do various small operations: extracting splin-

ters from the feet of the men, and removing coal-dust from the stokers' eyes. All the sailors were, of course, convinced that I was a lunatic. Why anyone should wish to be brought from a place as near the Garden of Eden as my father's house in Malta, to be landed in the wildest and most deserted spot in all Africa, was a question which completely passed their comprehension. But they were a good set of fellows, chiefly lascars and Arabs, and I was not at all resentful of their chaff.

Normally the three months' voyage would have thrilled me immeasurably, for the vessel was a freight boat, laden chiefly with slate and tinned butter, and we touched many places for the purpose of unloading, trading and coaling. But I was all impatience to reach my destination, and the continual calls fretted me endlessly. Morocco, Algeria, Sierra Leone, Gambia and the Gold and Ivory Coasts were all reached in turn, and at each place hordes of yelling natives rushed down to the quayside to barter with the crew. With eager black fingers, their red lips parted in a wide white grin, they displayed their treasures of ivory, their exquisitely worked mats and carpets, until I was sick of the sight of beads and rugs and trinkets. Nevertheless, the bartering habit inculcated in me during that voyage has remained with me to this day. Never, even now in civilised London, do I pay what I am asked for an article. I offer a price and walk out of the shop if it is not accepted.

Even on the boat I was not entirely devoid of animal companionship. For there was a baboon

on board, the ship's pet, and a great favourite with all the crew. It was a happy little creature, and spent most of the day swarming up the rigging and leaping gaily from shroud to shroud. When the dinner bell rang it would come swinging down through one of the hatches or ventilator shafts and sit chattering busily to us until we gave it some food.

On the night that we left Gambia, however, it so happened that one of the lascars came on board very drunk. He had been imbibing one of the potent native brews that are found in dirty little taverns all round the African coast, and was in a very aggressive and angry mood. By some unlucky chance the baboon happened to fall foul of the man, as he rolled blindly around the deck, and immediately trouble began. With a fiendish yell the sailor clutched the monkey, dragged it into the carpenter's shop, and belaboured it frenziedly with a stick. Not until he was worn out did the man allow the terrified baboon to depart.

From that moment the creature moped and refused all food. It whimpered and slunk away as we approached, and none of our coaxing availed; human beings were no longer to be trusted. At length, as we sailed along the shore between Gambia and the Ivory Coast, the monkey seemed to make up its mind. Suddenly it climbed up the rigging, in a scared way, so different from the joyous way in which it had climbed so many times before, until it had reached the topsail.

Then all at once it jumped. Normally monkeys jump sideways, from tree to tree or rope to rope, but the baboon did nothing of the sort. It just leaped up into the air and then came crashing down to the deck, meeting the hard wooden planks with a sickening thud.

It was a clear case of suicide, the suicide of a monkey with a broken heart. Owing to my insistence, for I had loved the monkey, the battered body was sewn up in canvas and weighted with lead. I said some prayers over it, for always I have been a firm believer in the importance of prayer, and my little animal friend was duly buried at sea.

This event saddened me. I was now entirely bereft of animals, and I longed more than ever for the time when my destination would be reached. At length after many days, wearisome to me, we left our last port of call and steamed slowly down the African Coast. Each day we were nearer the land of my dreams; each day I grew more and more excited as I glimpsed the dense virgin forests which seemed to reach almost down to the edge of the sea. Continually, in spite of my obvious emotion, the captain tried to dissuade me from my chosen purpose. But I laughed at him; he little knew that for the last sixteen years I had been planning and dreaming of this very moment.

Eventually, we reached the mouth of the Gaboon River. This river flows into the South Atlantic Ocean a few degrees south of the Equator,

and also serves as a dividing line between the Belgian and French Congo. Inland it penetrates the gloomy forests, seeming at times the only live thing in a world of death and decay. In that world the Gorilla is still king. Occasionally the shots of a big-game hunter destroy the silence of his kingdom. More occasionally still a film company invades his domain. But these white men merely touch the fringe of the great forests, which, in spite of fire-arms, motor cars and wireless, remain much as they have done for thousands of years.

I landed wet and dishevelled on the narrow beach of a remote part of the French Congo. Behind me were the great breakers of the Atlantic, and beyond them the boat which had brought me as near the coast as possible. In the raging turmoil of surf nothing could venture far, and the little dinghy that had brought me from the ship dared not risk too close a conflict with the boiling waters. A few yards from the shore, therefore, the men stopped rowing, and with a brief word of farewell I slipped over the side.

"Good-bye, good luck," came the cry of the sailors as they saw me scramble through the surf in safety. With long, sure strokes they rowed back to the waiting ship, smiling a little cynically, I expect, and wishing me the best of luck in an enterprise which seemed to them a slow but certain method of committing suicide.

As I stood watching the ship as she steamed slowly away to the horizon and civilisation a strange feeling came over me. I felt as though I

were a chosen person, a lord of creation. It was as if Nature had some great lesson to teach me, and had driven me from my comfortable home and loving parents to this green wilderness so that I should learn the secrets of the great apes. I knew all at once that my journey would be crowned with success, that whatever hardships and privations I suffered I would one day live in friendship among the King of Beasts.

So with scarcely a thought that the plume of smoke now fading into the distant haze was my last link with civilisation, I turned my back upon the sea and made my way towards the mangroves that grew densely down to the shore.

My equipment would have confirmed the orthodox explorer in the opinion that I was mad. Years before my father had given me a piece of advice which I had always treasured, knowing that one day I would find a use for it. "You are an inveterate wanderer, Jéuan," he said. "You will know what the wanderlust is before you are very much older. Always remember this when you are on your travels: there are only two essentials for the good traveller—a knife and a piece of string." These were the only two articles which I had with me now. The knife was of a queer Maltese shape, bought during one of my numerous visits to the market place at Bormla. Without it I should soon have succumbed to the terrible privations of those first months that I was to experience in the jungle. I had only the clothes that I was standing in, and soon, when I found how they caught on every

thorn and bramble and impeded my movements, I discarded all but a few rags which I tied like a loin-cloth about my middle.

But if I had little equipment I had youth and endless optimism on my side. Others had come to Africa to see the Gorilla, and had brought rifles and shot them. I was coming on a more peaceful mission ; I was to find the Gorilla and live with them, learning their customs, speaking their language, and sitting at their councils.

As I turned inland a few natives came straggling down to meet me. I had no wish to associate with any human beings, that was not part of my plan, and so I determined to discover from them the way I must take to get most quickly into the secret depths of the jungle. They were a dull-witted type of savage, evincing no surprise at the sudden appearance of a white man on their lonely and deserted shores. With a mixture of Arabic and sign-language I managed to make them understand me, and they, in their turn, drew pictures in the sand with a stick until I had comprehended their meaning. Their directions were of the simplest and most natural kind ; I was to let the wind blow on my left cheek for a certain number of days and on my right for a certain number. Eventually, I gathered from their primitive drawings, I should reach the fringe of the great virgin forests. I should be on the edge of the jungle.

It took me two months. The going was not particularly hard, except for my feet, which were not yet inured to continuous travel. Nor did the

question of food present much difficulty at first, for much of the land was in a primitive state of cultivation. From time to time I passed straggling native encampments, but the inhabitants merely stared dully at me and offered no hospitality. Often, too, I encountered strange insects and reptiles in my way. Most of them I had seen in captivity, however, and they did not interest me much. Nothing would content me but a meeting with the great apes.

At length I reached the fringe of the forest. The way became dark and impenetrable, filled with towering giant trees and a mass of clambering vegetation. The heat was terrific, a sort of steamy moisture in which I found that it was very difficult to breathe. And from all around came the constant humming of innumerable insects. I knew then, as I plunged into the tangled undergrowth and wiped the sweat from my steaming brow, that at last I had reached the land of my dreams, that somewhere in these dense and secret depths dwelt the object of my search—the Gorilla.

The riot of vegetation was amazing. High above me was the thick foliage of the trees, palms, mahoganies, baobabs and cotton trees, while around me there was nothing but a chaos of parasite plants illumined by an occasional ray of sunlight, which pierced through a rift in the intertwining tree-tops and slanted down like an arrow. Many people talk of the intense competition of civilisation and the way in which the weak and defenceless are driven to the wall, but that is

nothing to the fierce competition of the African jungle. Every plant has a blood-lust, every plant seems to owe its existence to the death of something else. "Kill or be killed" is the motto of the place. There before me gigantic and majestic trees were being strangled to death by parasitic lianas. Stately palms and screw-pines were withering, sucked dry of sap by the crawling horror. And hideously the murderers sprawled about, their fleshy tendrils gently waving in search of food. Even as I watched a small bird fell the prey of a great orchid-like plant which closed like a trap upon it. For a time the plant satiated itself, and then gradually the purple petals unfolded again, disgorging a pathetic relic of brittle bones. I shuddered at the sight and unconsciously stepped aside lest the plant should be tempted to trap my hand.

The atmosphere of the dank, steaming forest was oppressive in the extreme, and as I pushed my way through the thick coarse grass I found myself soaked with sweat. The thorns and brambles tore my clothes into tatters, and as soon as any part of my body was exposed insects settled on it and began the torture that was to drive me near to madness. I became very aware that I should have to pay a high price for that vital experience for which my soul craved. But there was no turning back. I had resolved to come to grips with the forest, and failure meant a slow and painful death.

After an hour's arduous scramble through the

darkness I came to a clearing, so fair after the crawling gloom of the trees that it seemed like a smooth green lawn planted and laid out by the hand of man. I looked around cautiously for signs of life, for I intended to avoid all human beings, whether civilised or not. But the clearing was as deserted as the forest. I found afterwards that these clearings came periodically, and evidently fulfilled some natural functions as "lungs." I decided to stay here for the night, for the sun was now nearing the horizon, and the open space seemed to offer some protection from prowling animals.

A solitary forked tree in the centre of the clearing was, I decided, a good position for my resting-place, though I had no intention of sleeping. My animal intuition, which had been given full scope in childhood and was not repressed as it is in most children, warned me that night was the time when terror stalked abroad, especially the hour after sunset and the hour before dawn. Beasts who have slept through the heat of the day are prowling about in the freshness of the first hour of night, while those disappointed of a kill are at their fiercest just before the sunrise. They will eat anything that crosses their path, and so I was not anxious to encounter them. I realised that I would have to watch all night, and decided to fashion some sort of couch on which to pass my vigil, and also to gather some food.

The first task was easy enough. I cut down some of the trailing creepers and lianas with my

knife and laced them together so that they formed a crude sort of hammock. On this foundation I heaped smooth tussocks of dry grass from the clearing and soon had a comfortable bed slung across the fork of the tree, comfortable, that is, compared with some that I had experienced, for though young I had slept in many strange places.

My couch completed, I turned my attention to the question of food and drink. Round the trees that fringed the clearing I could see no fruit. I had passed no streams in the forest and obviously could not drink the stagnant marsh water, the home of fever-laden insects. This steaming wilderness of vegetation offered no hospitality, only constant danger.

Water was not such a pressing necessity as food. I had known times in my youth in Malta when water was sold for a farthing a glass and I was used to drinking very little. But food I must have if I was to keep up my strength and be ready for my first meeting with the Gorilla. I set off warily on a careful tour of inspection, hoping to make the most of the few moments of sunlight left before the sudden onrush of the tropic night.

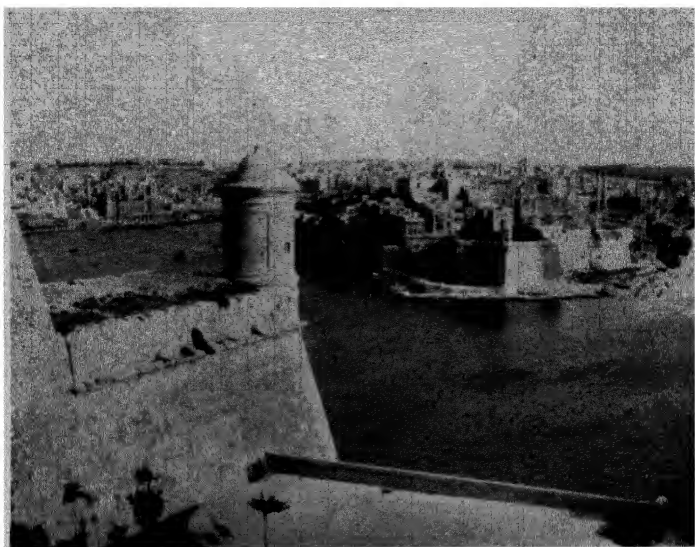
Fear gripped my heart as my search yielded nothing, nothing but the gnarled trunks of trees and the fleshy, poisonous-looking tendrils of the twining parasites. Hopefully I broke off a succulent leaf and chewed it, but, though it yielded some moisture and quenched my thirst, it had no sustenance in it, and even seemed to emphasise my hunger. Dismally I turned back to the clear-

ing. Danger from sudden attack I had expected and would have met, but slow death from starvation was a prospect which sapped my courage. I was about to walk sadly across to my tree when suddenly I spied, with the last gleam of the setting sun, a bunch of plantains on a tree close by, half-hidden by the ever-present liana.

Evidently some native had once cultivated this clearing, but the fiercely encroaching forest had submerged his little hut and had left only this one plantain to save my life. It really seemed as if some benign power had led my weary eyes to the saving fruit. With the welcome find in my arms I stumbled through the clearing, now as dark as the surrounding forest, and climbed into my eyrie.

Words cannot describe the splendour of the African forest at night. The moon soared above the tree-tops and tipped everything with silver. Around me giant palms waved their enormous fans in the gentle night airs, and above me was the bright galaxy of tropic stars. But enchanting though the forest was to look at, there was a continual stir and whisper, which told of lurking danger. Sudden strange noises sounded below me, the harsh crackle of a leaf, the fearful call of a night bird. From the far distance came the throb of a voodoo drum where some natives were practising their foul and unnatural rites. I was to have a nearer acquaintance of these orgies before I left the forest.

So I stayed, marvelling at the sights and sounds around me. Everywhere there was an air of



ISOLA POINT, MALTA. THE BIRTHPLACE OF JÉUAN
DU BERRIE



JÉUAN DU BERRIE WITH A TARANTULA

hushed expectancy, as though the jungle itself were sharing my lonely vigil. As the first pale light of dawn streaked through the forest and turned its darkness to grey a leopard walked below me. I waited tense upon my perch with my knife ready in my hand. I felt no fear, for I believe that a man armed as I was and completely self-possessed would be a match for any leopard. But this time I did not have to put my opinion to the test. The sleek beast seemed to sense that this was no easy prey, for though he hesitated beneath me and licked his chops, he continued on his way, stepping carefully into the shelter of the trees.

So I passed my first night in the jungle, and in many ways it was typical of my life for the next few months. I pressed slowly into the depths of the forest, and thought of little save my ultimate objective and the privations of the moment. I suffered agonies from insects. One bored its way into my thigh and laid its eggs. The result was that as I arose from my siesta one afternoon I found that my leg was so swollen that I could only walk with the greatest of difficulty. Obviously I should be easy prey for the first animal that I met, until the leg was healed, so I employed a drastic remedy. I cut away the diseased flesh in my thigh with my knife, bound up the wound with a poultice of leaves and my valuable piece of string, and went into hiding until I could walk again. I carry that mark on my thigh to this day.

That taught me a lesson, and I bent my wits to the task of avoiding insect bites. I remembered

a remark of my father's. One day we had been looking at some insects through a microscope. " You see those little hairs all over their bodies ? " he said. " It's because of those hairs that insects cannot go near grease." If only I could find some grease I could be rid of those pernicious insects. I managed it at length by catching lizards, small snakes and iguanas, taking the lard out of their liver, and smearing it all over myself, hair, eyes, everywhere. To cover my back I was compelled to lace the greasy skins to a tree-trunk and rub myself up and down against them. So I rid myself of that scourge.

The iguanas I used also for food. They were queer, scaly little creatures, with a loose skin hanging down from the throat to the breast, which they puffed up like a bladder when they were angry. They are the most harmless of all animals of the forest, feeding placidly by the banks of a stream on the creamy flowers of the *Mahot*, and taking to the trees to sleep. On land they move very swiftly, but once in the branches of a tree they never stir, and I was easily able to capture them with a swift grab or to lasso them with my piece of string.

The rest of my diet consisted chiefly of wild berries, bananas and sugar-cane. The sugar-cane I found very nasty at first as I sucked the juice and spat out the rough pith, but gradually I became accustomed to the sickly-sweet flavour. The dampness of the atmosphere, and the leaves and berries which I chewed, enabled me to go for

long periods without water. It was nauseating to drink from the stagnant pools and sluggish streams, which were filled with the rotting bodies of dead animals and the stench of decaying vegetation. Crocodiles, too, were a menace, and if ever I was forced to drink from a stream I would rush forward, cup my hands hurriedly, and run back before the great scaly beasts basking on the bank could lash out at me with their powerful tails. They have a loathsome habit of eating only rotten flesh ; they drown their victims, drag them down to a larder under the mud, and wait until the carcass is decayed before devouring it. But in spite of these disgusting creatures there were times when I had to drink. Occasionally, indeed, liquid of any kind became so scarce that I was reduced to moistening my lips with my own urine.

Sleep presented another problem. As I penetrated farther into the interior the darkness became one hideous nightmare of howling beasts and weird noises. Nothing could shut out these dreadful sounds ; I lay in my hammock with every nerve on edge. And as a result I rarely got more than four hours' sleep out of every twenty-four.

In spite of the obvious presence of wild beasts around me during the night time, the thing that struck me most forcibly as I pressed farther and farther into the Gorilla country was the lack of any sign of the larger carnivorous animals. Reptiles and insects were there in abundance, but where were the lions, the elephants, and above all where were the Gorilla of which I had heard so

much? It is true that I had had one meeting with a leopard and was soon to have another. It happened in this way. Night was falling, and as usual I picked out a suitable tree for my resting-place. I was half-way up it, climbing swiftly and noiselessly, for I was an expert climber in those days, when I saw above me a pair of glowing lamps. My eyes, which had become attuned to the queer half-lights of the forest, distinguished the tawny hide of a full-grown leopard. For a moment I hesitated; I had in my hand only a wooden cudgel made from a knobbed vine. But I knew that most wild animals are very cowardly when confronted by man and I felt no fear. Softly I spoke to it, making the "ca-ow" noise with which one leopard greets another, and the sleek beast crept closer and closer until I could feel its hot breath on my cheek. Then suddenly I lunged out with my club, striking the branch on which the leopard crouched, and in a flash the lithe creature had sprung from its perch and disappeared silently into the undergrowth.

But this was my only real contact with animal life as I wandered for two months alone in the dense tangle of the African forest. I covered about fifty miles during those sixty days and all the time I was in an acute state of nervous tension. At length I began to feel disheartened. Was I after all to meet with dismal failure? Where in all this impenetrable vastness was the one object of my search—Gorilla?

CHAPTER III

I MEET THE GORILLA

ONE bright morning I was startled by a noise like distant thunder. The sky, as I had just seen from my eyrie in the tree-tops, was quite clear and cloudless, and I knew that the sound was not hollow enough for the trumpeting of elephants. All at once, with my heart beating uncontrollably, I recognised it. It was the noise that the Gorilla make in moments of great agitation, beating their deep breasts and roaring. My excitement was intense, and the depression which had begun to steal over me during the past few weeks dropped from me like magic. I started to make my way as quickly as I could through the gloom of the forest towards a clearing from which I thought the sound might be coming.

As I neared the place I knew that my guess was right. I climbed a tree some distance from the edge of the clearing, having no intention of running into the arms of danger, and then I made my way cautiously from tree to tree, eager to see the thing that was making such a mighty and fearful sound.

Almost from the beginning of my life in the

forest I had taken to the trees, to escape from the danger of creatures lurking in the undergrowth. It was a quick and easy mode of travel, for the intertwining branches gave a continual foothold, and the lianas stretched like a network from trunk to trunk. So now I went swinging along as agilely as a monkey, making as little noise as possible and wondering all the time if I had at last come to the end of my long and arduous search.

Awe-inspiring indeed was the sight that met my eyes as I peered warily round the bole of a huge mahogany tree. In the centre of the clearing was an immense Gorilla. I had seen many of them in captivity, but never before had I seen anything to equal the splendour of this monster. I knew then that it was no idle fancy that had driven me so many miles into the jungle and had made me suffer so many privations. He was indeed King of the Forest, past whom the leopard skulks in fear, and whom even the tawny lion treats with respect.

He was evidently very angry. He beat his breast with renewed fury and his roar rose from a deep bass to a shrill treble. As he roamed round the clearing, tearing down branches as thick as a man's arm from the smaller trees, I had a chance of examining him closely. He had an enormous belly and a very deep chest, which was practically bare of hair. Except for the huge jaw his face was surprisingly human, but the sound that issued from his lips seemed beyond all human making.

As I watched his temper burned itself out. His

roars quietened and he stopped beating his breast. I discovered afterwards that all Gorilla stand up and challenge the rising sun, as though it were a deadly enemy, and this was what the animal had been doing in the clearing. Now that he had calmed down again I decided to emerge from my retreat and show myself to him, but just as I was about to descend he turned between two trees and was gone. I met him many times later and knew more of his rages from close range. I think that if I had gone out to him that first early morning I should have had short shrift.

During the rest of the day and the following night my heart was full of gladness. I had taken my life into my hands in coming to the forest naked and alone in order to learn the great lesson which awaited me. Now the moment was at hand. I had found the Gorilla and was about to make friends with them. Maybe I was going to pass the rest of my life in the primal simplicity of the forest, alone with the wonderful apes. As the dawn broke and tipped the leaves with crimson I knelt on the broad branch of a tree and prayed that success might come to my enterprise and help me to make friendship grow between beast and man. Then gathering together my knife and a few pointed sticks I set off to find the Gorilla.

I went to the clearing where I had seen the solitary Gorilla the day before, and even when I was some distance away I heard in the stillness of the forest noises which showed me that Gorilla were there. The sounds were deep, guttural

grunts, which the animals make when eating, and short, sharp barks of delight, half-way between a cluck and a pant. The Gorilla have jaws formed very differently from ours and cannot articulate, so that all the sounds are produced in the throat.

I pushed my way towards the noises, eagerly parting the clambering vegetation, and as I did so suddenly came face to face with what I was seeking. There, not five feet away, stood a magnificent Gorilla. As far as I could tell it was the same beast as the one I had seen on the previous day. He was obviously old for the hair was worn off his back in patches, and on the shoulders it was faintly tinged with grey. I stood still, every nerve in my body tingling, and as I watched him I could feel on my naked flesh the heat that emanated from his body. Then all at once I began to beat my breast and utter the cry of peace, the cry which I had learned so carefully from my captive Gorilla friends back in Malta: "Ah, Ah, Ah. Ow, Ow, Ow." For an instant he hesitated, hearing the familiar cry, and I felt as though I could read what was going on within his little brain.

"This is very strange," he seemed to be saying to himself. "Here is a queer animal in the forest, apparently not afraid of me. He does not look like a Gorilla, and yet he makes a noise like one and talks our language. It's altogether beyond my comprehension. Perhaps I'd better go and think it over." He gave a great roar, which for a second I thought was a prelude to an attack, but instead

he turned into the thick undergrowth and disappeared. I followed as quickly as I could, banging my head against the trunks of the trees in my haste to keep up with him, but he was more used to the forest than I was, and soon he had completely vanished from sight and left me alone.

As I made my way back to the clearing I was jubilant. Although I had failed to make friends with the Gorilla at this my first attempt, I had at least established contact. Once again as I neared the place I heard the deep grunts and the cries of pleasure that told me that the object of my search was not far away. Once again I climbed the gigantic mahogany tree and cautiously parted its leaves.

From my observation post I saw a small family of Gorilla on the far side of the clearing. There was a large male, younger than the one which I had already encountered, but quite full-grown, two females and two young ones. The male was busily engaged in eating his breakfast, if it could be so called, for the Gorilla are great eaters and would feed all day without a break if they could find enough of the right food. He was squatting down on his haunches and had his great arms round a bush. He dragged the whole bush towards him, uttering the cry that I had just attempted to make: "Ah, Ah, Ah. Ow, Ow, Ow." Then he began to pull off great mouthfuls and eat them. His jaws champed powerfully, and I heard the sound of his teeth as they crunched the leaves and bark together.

The female nearest to me was playing with one of the young ones, lying on her back and raising the little fellow up on her powerful back legs. These limbs are immensely strong. I have seen the Gorilla stretch down one of their legs from the branches of a tree and lift up one of their playmates bodily. But now this great female, who could have disembowelled me with one blow of her arm, was handling the young one with the tenderest care and he was crowing with delight. The other female was busily searching her offspring's hair.

Cautiously I lowered myself to the ground and set out towards the family. The huge male scented me before I was well out of the shade of the mahogany tree. He loosed the bush which he had been clasping to his breast and gave a great bellow. He stood upright, five or six feet of towering strength, let out a deep roar and rushed at me. As he thundered towards me, crushing beneath him any bush that lay in his path, I side-stepped and made for the trees. For a minute, as I swarmed up the mahogany, I thought that my last hour had come. I heard him panting behind me and growling deep down in his throat. But luckily the Gorilla was a full-grown specimen, weighing close on 700 pounds as far as I could judge, and this great weight meant that he was too heavy to climb the trees. He was forced to stay on the ground, and I was safe in my perch. This is a very common occurrence in the Gorilla world, the majority of full-grown beasts being forced to become groundlings.

I remained in my retreat until the Gorilla had rejoined his family again, and then I once more climbed down and approached them. This time, although they looked back over their shoulders at me as they ate, they made no attempt to charge me, and I was able to come within twenty yards of them. They were still wary of me, they edged away if I came too close for their peace of mind, but at least they began to get used to me.

I was, after all, not so very different from them in appearance. All vestige of clothing had long since disappeared, torn to ribbons by the clinging briars, and I was burnt to a deep brown all over by the scorching sun. The heat of the sun was, in fact, so intense that if I ventured out in the noonday it used to catch me between the shoulders and make me faint and giddy, until at length I was forced to travel only in the early morning or in the cool of the evening. My hair and beard had grown long, and were matted with the grease that I smeared on to protect myself from the insects. I never washed in the forest, but although by civilised standards I probably looked revolting, I never felt healthier in my life.

Gradually the Gorilla let me approach, until by sunset I had succeeded so well that I was almost able to touch them. As night fell, and they began moving slowly away from the clearing, eating as they went, I realised regretfully that for a time, at any rate, I must leave them and seek the safety of my eyrie.

On the way back I passed the stream that

pursued its sluggish course not far from my resting-place. A movement on the bank attracted my attention, and I saw a huge crocodile draw itself quickly up the muddy side, followed by another still larger one. Evidently a fight was about to take place, and I knew enough about the habits of crocodiles to know that it would be a fight of unequalled fury, and that the result would inevitably be the death of one of the combatants. So it came to pass. The pursuer threw himself bodily on his prey, which lashed the ground furiously with its tail and struggled in insensate rage to throw off its attacker. The eyes of the two reptiles glowed with a ferocity more bestial than I have ever seen elsewhere in my life, and yet the fight was almost noiseless, the mud softening the impact of their bodies. An occasional snap of the teeth and the thud of the flaying tails were all the sounds that came to me as I watched from the cover of the mangroves.

The fight was short-lived. The larger crocodile had obtained a strong hold at his first attack and after a while, as his victim weakened, he raised himself up off the ground with the other held between his great jaws, and then threw his prey sideways, breaking its back. The dying monster lashed the ground in its death agony, twisted over, and, with a last painful effort, straightened itself and died. The other, a sullen victor, slid into the water and disappeared.

Shuddering a little at the merciless and seemingly senseless murder which I had just witnessed,

I traced the path back to my resting-place, busying myself with my primitive housekeeping on the way. I replenished my dwindling store of plantains, gathered a few wild guavas and a number of huge leaves, shaped like English docks, but very much bigger, which I found very refreshing to chew. Laden with these I returned to my tree-house. For the past month I had made use of one particular tree, and it was considerably better than the one in which I had passed my first jungle nights. At the top I had constructed a firm platform from which I kept a look-out at night, and below was another platform for storing food. Between the two was my liana-woven hammock which kept reasonably dry during the rains. I finished the task of storing the fruit in my larder, ate my frugal supper, and went aloft to the look-out to keep my nightly vigil.

As I sat listening to the noises around me and thinking of the events of the past few hours, the joy in my heart was very great. I had now come within sight of the end of my search and I felt confident that success would attend my efforts. I am certain that in animals there is some mysterious sixth sense which tells them who is a friend and who is an enemy. In many men that sense has atrophied, but my unusual upbringing had saved it for me, though I would not claim to have the quick sense that animals have. But I knew quite confidently that the Gorilla were to be my friends, that the next time I met a small family I should be able to walk amongst them unharmed.

The nervous strain of the previous months must have been more than I realised, for, now that the struggle with uncertainty was over, I felt an indescribable peace steal over me, and as I settled myself for my watch I knew that life was only beginning for me, and that the morrow held wonders.

But before the long-wished-for hope was realised my life nearly came to an abrupt conclusion, as I kept my vigil in the branches. The miracle of African night never palled on me. The great tree in whose topmost branches I was perched, waved gently in the breeze. In the west the dying sun painted splendours on the clouds as it sank behind the trees into the ocean upon whose bosom I had once floated, it now seemed many years ago, almost in a previous existence. To the east waved many tree-tops, silver in the moonlight, and as I turned this way I heard the cries of the forest: the wail of a leopard out in the early night for an unwary prey, the distant trumpeting of a bull elephant wild with rage for some reason beyond my ken, and very much nearer the coughing of some animal, perhaps a cheetah. This seemed to be almost below my tree, and I leaned forward to catch a glimpse of its eyes in the clearing. As I did so I put my hand upon a branch to steady myself, but to my horror and surprise the branch whipped up my arm. My flesh shrank as it felt the cool body of a snake encircling it.

I had already had some experience of snakes in Malta. My brother had once told me in a some-

what patronising way that he would show me how to handle snakes and would catch one for my zoo. We had gone to a place in Isola where we knew there were many of the reptiles, and my brother caught one. In spite of his boasting, however, he did not hold it properly, and it bit him between the index and middle fingers. Every year after that the place on his hand swelled up during the month when he had been bitten.

Those snakes, although venomous, were not poisonous, but now I knew myself to be in mortal danger. I thought quickly and calmly. In an emergency in the jungle it is essential not to get flurried. Obviously the snake was taken by surprise and thought itself attacked, for there is no animal or reptile alive which will attack a human being unless it is blind with hunger or rage. But this eight foot of venom, for my assailant was probably a mamba, was startled and might attack me at any moment. Its head was behind my right shoulder and I could not seize its neck to ward off the blow.

Snakes have no ears and therefore there is no snake language, though they have a marvellous sense of smell. But they are very sensitive to vibrations and, as snake charmers know well, they can be enraged or soothed by means of these vibrations set up by the mouth. I had experimented with many of the smaller snakes in my father's laboratory in Malta, and had little thought then that I was to owe my life to these investigations.

The snake and I were rigidly still, except that from the movement of my upper arm I knew that its head was waving to and fro. My left arm, on which my weight was resting, was becoming stiff, but it was essential that for the next four or five minutes I should make not the slightest movement of arm or leg. Opening my mouth, I began to set up those vibrations which so often, lying on my stomach before the cages of my father's snakes, I had made to vipers and adders, rendered harmless by the extraction of their fangs.

It must have presented a strange picture to that cheetah wandering in the clearing below, as I stayed silhouetted against the moon. Some Greek sculptor might have found here the inspiration for a Laocoön, but he would have been sorely troubled to account for the strange sound which issued from my mouth as, minute after minute, I kept up the strange lip movement.

The waving of the snake's head continued, and I was beginning to despair, for I could not maintain the tenseness of my muscles much longer. I wondered if with a sudden twist or jerk I could dislodge the reptile, though I knew that its movement would be much quicker than mine. Then suddenly it moved up my arm. I felt a coldness glide down the middle of my back, and all at once it was gone into the darkness of the trees. I had soothed the terror of the snake and saved myself from what would have been almost certain death. This was not my only escape from death from snakes in Africa, but it was easily the most terrify-

ing. Later I was to have a valuable ally who helped to rid me of the menace.

The horror of the past few minutes being over, I resolved to keep a closer watch in future, for I felt that my joy in meeting the Gorilla had led me into slackening some of my usual awareness. Then I propped myself against the main trunk and passed the rest of the night quietly.

CHAPTER IV

ADOPTED BY THE GREAT APES

THE next morning, after a good feed of the fruits that I had collected the day before, I set out to join the Gorilla. I made for the clearing where I had seen them on the two previous days but found it empty. The Gorilla do not live together unless there are young, but in a scattered community. Knowing this, I was not daunted by my first lack of success, but struggled through the matted undergrowth to look for them elsewhere.

It was not long before I came across a solitary Gorilla. He was old and bent and, strangely enough, he was walking with the aid of a stick. He did not see me, for I concealed myself behind a tree and watched him pass, thinking that this old fellow was hardly the sort for me to choose as my first friend. He halted a moment to turn over some decaying leaves and I had a good view of the terrible callosities on his hands, and the scars which he had gained in the many wars that he had waged before he lost his strength and had to roam along the ground instead of swinging up amongst the trees. The hair was quite worn away on his back, and on the lower part of his body it

was flecked here and there with grey. His enormous belly sagged between his legs and got in his way when he walked. At last, snorting a little with disappointment, he abandoned his leaves and continued on his way, jogging from side to side with the aid of his stick. When he was out of sight I continued to the next clearing.

Gorilla do not laugh, but they produce a high clucking noise from the back of the throat which indicates pleasure. It was this sound which greeted me when I was within hearing of the open space. With my heart beating fast with anticipation and joy I looked upon one of the fairest scenes of my whole life. In the middle of the shady glade was a great Gorilla, seated on the ground and looking like some majestic king. Around him, munching the luxuriant herbage, roamed two young ones and two females, clucking with pleasure and crushing the juicy shoots between their great teeth.

No one I suppose has ever beheld such a magnificent sight. There in front of me was the fair leafy glade, flecked with light and shade and covered with long grass; and close at hand were the mighty Kings of the Forest. Hiding behind the trees that fringed the clearing and slipping cautiously from one to another, I moved slowly towards them. But in spite of my caution they scented me and, in a flash, as the strange smell was wafted to their nostrils, they disappeared into the gloom of the forest. Quickly, before they had time to go far, I went out into the middle of the

meeting of mine with the young Gorilla. They edged from side to side, looked at me from all angles, and were very obviously ready to tear me to bits if I showed the slightest sign of hostility. Then they started to touch me and push me with their horny knuckles, which was not a very pleasant sensation. At last one of them broke the ice. While I had my back turned to him he rushed up behind me and took a great tug at my hair. The tears sprang to my eyes, and acting suddenly as my instinct bade me, I rushed after him as he made for the trees, tripped him and threw myself on his back. Soon there was a medley of limbs on the grass, my own mingled with the black ones of the Gorilla, and, though I had to be careful to avoid the sharp teeth, I knew that I was accepted, that, in spite of my white skin, I was adopted by the Gorilla.

Our rough-and-tumble over, we rested on the soft grass, and as I lay panting and sore from the boisterous encounter a wild feeling of exhilaration surged over me. At last my dream had come true ; at last I was conscious of the real pleasure that is experienced only by those who are completely in tune with Nature. Eight months or thereabouts had elapsed since I first landed in the Gaboon country and I had now attained my goal. All I had to do now was to spend my life with the Gorilla, and I felt no reluctance at the prospect, but rather a deep sense of fulfilment. I knew that I would be happier in the great dark forest than amid all the pleasures and attractions

of civilisation. Even now, when I am living in the heart of one of the world's greatest cities, I often feel a nostalgia for the forest. I wake up in the night, a prey to a sick longing for my animal friends, and resolve again and again that I will return and end my days in the carefree life of the jungle.

While the young Gorilla and I rested from our boisterous frolic the older one set to work to uproot a palm tree that grew on the edge of the clearing. If I had any doubt of the strength of the Gorilla it would have been banished by this display. The tree was some eighteen feet high and as thick as a man's thigh. The Gorilla shook it in his hands as if to test its strength, then he dropped all four feet to the ground and began to push the tree over. It was an amazing sight to see the great muscles of his back working and rippling underneath the skin, and to watch the tree bending before such irresistible force. At last with a crash it fell to the ground and I and my companions gathered round to share out the nuts.

The meal over, we began to wander somewhat aimlessly through the forest. The Gorilla walk on all fours but almost upright owing to the great length of their arms. I trained myself very quickly to do likewise, for I thought it well to appear as much like the Gorilla as possible. I experienced some discomfort at first, but my knuckles soon became tough and my back no longer ached. I still have the corns on the backs

of my hands, and when I am talking to people now I find a constant tendency to place my hands knuckles down on the table in front of me, a habit which I try to break and into which I continually slip. So we wandered, looking from right to left in search of food, for the Gorilla are always hungry. Apparently we had no settled course through the forest and no particular object in view, yet after about half an hour's wandering my companions set up a cry and three females with young appeared out of the gloom.

I was subjected to the same careful inspection as before. In fact I soon found that every time I met strange Gorilla I had to be prepared to undergo the same ritual of smelling, pinching and scratching. They were all inordinately fond of trying their teeth on my hide, as the older one had done when I first ventured into the clearing on my mission of friendship. What was going on in their small brains I cannot say, but the reaction seemed similar to that of a child who puts anything in its mouth to see if it is good to eat.

Wonderfully peaceful and uneventful were the first few days with my new friends. We kept together in a small band, the old male, the five females, the young ones and myself, and although the youngsters occasionally wandered off on little secret expeditions of their own they always returned. But although my acceptance by the Gorilla had been easier than I had expected I had a presentiment that all the initiation was not yet over. I realised that the old male lived only with

females and young ones because he could no longer fight the full-grown Gorilla and maintain his position as ruler of the clan, even though his waning strength seemed colossal to me. It was borne in upon me that I, too, should have to face a trial by combat with the growing youngsters, and as I watched the five of them I thought I knew with whom I should have to fight.

The young male that I had tripped up in that first rough game of introduction was slightly larger than the others, and when I approached him I noticed that his crest ruffled up and he looked very menacingly at me. In spite of my overtures of friendship and my offers of choice fruits and leaves this enmity persisted. The shock of my attack had engraved hatred of me in his mind, and, bearing this in mind, I made a point of retrieving my Maltese blade. I thought to myself, "I must be careful not to let him come upon me unawares, for I can expect no help from the others," and I began the habit of walking beside the older male, who seemed to exercise some sort of authority over the others and who, I thought, might see that fair play was allowed to me.

My fear and caution were soon to be justified.

It was the breeding season. During those early days I was much interested in the habits of the Gorilla, and one day I spent a long time watching a female who had just been delivered. She chewed the umbilical cord through, moved the little one on to her legs, which she brought together to form

a cradle, and then raised the infant up to her breast where instinct commanded him to grip. Even at this early age the Gorilla has terrific strength in his fingers, and during the year in which the baby hangs to the hair on his mother's breast she can fight, gambol, swing from tree to tree, and yet he is never dislodged, though from time to time he may give a plaintive cry like that of a child in pain.

It was apparently because I was watching this wonderful example of mother-love that my opponent's patience broke. All at once he swung down from a low branch and came thundering towards me, crest up and mighty arms extended so that I should get a blow with his forearm in the pit of my stomach. He was a magnificent beast, some five feet high, although he was only partly grown, and with immensely wide shoulders and strong arms. I had no intention of staying to fight with him, for I knew that I could not put up much resistance against the three-inch canines and the long cruel hands. I side-stepped his first rush and raced across the clearing to the tree in which I had now rigged up my primitive house. This, I calculated, would not bear a Gorilla's weight at the top and I could stand a siege until his anger abated.

I have never climbed a tree before or since quite as quickly as I climbed that one. I had caught a glimpse of my pursuer's face as he came for me. Normally the Gorilla is one of the most hideous sights that can be seen in the world, but now, wild

with rage and with his crest standing upright on his head, he was awe-inspiring in the extreme. No wonder that I took no notice of the damage that I did to myself as I climbed that tree. My hands were cut and bleeding, my legs grazed by the rough bark, but I passed my two platforms without a stop and was soon on my look-out, where I had decided that he would not venture.

Looking down, I saw him climbing to the top-most platform. As I had expected, the climb had cooled his anger, and although he gave me a long look to make sure that I was still there, he made no effort to climb higher. Instead, he prowled about my platform, picking at the laced lianas, which, being dead, had set very hard, and then he descended to my store, pulling down one end of my hammock in sheer destructiveness as he did so. Arrived amongst my fruit, he scattered some of it so that it fell to the ground, then he carried some bananas back to the top platform and settled down to a feed.

My hopes rose quickly, for I thought that he would forget all about the vendetta when he had finished his meal. He gave me a look from time to time, but made no move, preferring to munch placidly at my fruit. My store had been rifled many times before by mischievous and greedy apes, and as I watched him chewing the food that I had gathered so carefully I decided that I would no longer keep a larder. There is no law of property in the jungle.

His meal finished, the Gorilla proceeded to dash my hopes very abruptly. He seized the main trunk of the tree and started to push it to and fro in an effort to dislodge me. He soon had it moving about much too quickly for my comfort, and though I had no fears that the trunk would snap, I was afraid that my stomach would not stand this violent motion for long.

Help came quite unexpectedly. The old Gorilla suddenly shambled out of the gloom of the forest, stationed himself at the bottom of the tree and began the great Gorilla roar. I cannot describe the terror which this roar can instil. People who hear the lion roar in captivity find that the noise inspires in them a fearful awe, but this is as nothing to the terrific challenge of the Gorilla. It begins low down, something like the roar of the lion, and then rises until it is a high-pitched scream. No man can imitate this awful cry, for he has neither the lung power nor the high palate of the Gorilla. The sound reverberates through the silence of the forest like a mighty peal of thunder, and every creature that hears it slinks back into its lair afraid.

My attacker heard it and immediately, as though drawn by some invisible force, began a slow descent of the tree. No sooner had he set his feet on the ground than a terrific struggle began. With their powerful forearms interlocked the animals strained this way and that, seeking for a stranglehold or grip for their mighty teeth. They fought silently, only a few deep and malevo-

lent grunts issuing from their mouths, and soon the hair on their backs and chests was matted with blood. In a little while the older one had two more great wounds to add to the scars of earlier fights, but his superior experience and greater weight gained the day, and at length the youngster made off, uttering fearsome cries. We saw little of him for some time, but when I did meet him again he seemed to have forgotten that there was anything unusual about me. I may say that it is very unusual for two Gorilla to fight over anything other than a female.

This incident began what I can without exaggeration call the greatest friendship of my life. It took me some time to gain the full confidence of the wise and wary old beast, but when I did so no man ever had a truer pal. People often say that the dog is the only real friend of man, but this Gorilla was more than a friend. He became my boon and travelling companion, deserting his wives and family in order that he might roam through the forest alone with me. He had a fine character, finer than that of many men, and he stood by me through thick and thin. I am assured that he even gave up his life in an effort to protect me. He was always as gentle as a mother with her babe, and would, if he came across a peculiarly succulent grub or insect, offer it to me, though I could not very often bring myself to accept these gifts. We rarely strayed far from each other, and even when we slept we stayed close together, he propping himself against the broad trunks of the

trees and mounting guard while I climbed higher and lay in my crude hammock. It gave me a wonderful feeling of confidence and security to know that such a stalwart fellow was mounting guard over me and protecting me from all harm. I discovered that I was able to sleep much more soundly than I had done before I found such a faithful protector to watch over me. Gorilla, incidentally, are very late risers and put in an inordinate amount of sleep each day.

(As the weeks went by my friend grew more and more fond of me. He was very jealous, and if we came across any families of apes in the jungle, as we frequently did, he used to catch hold of my arm and try to pull me away. He was afraid, I suppose, that I might be tempted to join them and leave him with only the females and young ones for company.) He was growing old, his strength was waning, and he seemed to find in me something which the others failed to give him; companionship and a little fun.

One day in particular is stamped on my memory as illustrating this love of a brother which he felt for me. We were resting together after a romp and I fell into that state between sleep and waking, when one is just conscious of what is going on around one. While I was in this counterfeit sleep my friend took me up in his strong, hairy arms and clasped me against his bosom. I knew what was happening, as I felt myself lifted off the ground into the air, but I never moved, for I had absolute trust in my friend. He rocked me gently

in his arms, patted me on the back as a mother will often pat her child, and so continued for some time. I felt love for him rising in my heart, and when at last I opened my eyes they were wet with tears.

CHAPTER V

A FOREST JOURNAL

EASE and contentment was the essence of my lot amongst my Gorilla friends. They accepted me with perfect grace, and as long as I made no move towards disturbing the little ones hanging to the thick hair on their mothers' chests they showed no displeasure at my company. Life moved on happily, and I became the complete hedonist, eating, sleeping, and playing in the forest.

Some days were undoubtedly monotonous for, as I have said, animals have only three mainsprings of existence, food, bodily recreation and sleep. But though monotonous they were perfectly natural, and therefore perfectly happy. It was so wonderful to be unhampered by the burdens and taxations of civilisation ; no food or clothes to buy, no lodgings to pay for, no one to order me to walk on the right or on the left. Free and naked I roamed through the forest, in the state in which Nature originally ordained man to be.

But although the life was simple, it was precarious also. There were pitfalls of every description, and dangers from animals, reptiles and even plants. And to relieve the occasional monotony

there were outstanding and not always pleasant events ; grim fights for life in the darkness, desperate searches for water, the ceaseless torment of poisonous insects. But the boundless freedom of my forest existence amply compensated for any possible dangers.

I have often wished, as I sit in the midst of man and civilisation again, dreaming of those carefree days in Africa, that I had been able to keep a record of my daily life there ; some permanent diary of my feelings and doings that I could turn to now, when I am homesick for the forest. I have only my memories to sustain me, and although they will never fade, for my experiences were too wonderful for that ever to happen, their first freshness is beginning to wane a little. My daily routine, and the observations which I made, had I entered them in a journal, would have read, I believe, somewhat in this fashion :

Every morning I awoke at six o'clock, forced into consciousness by the shrill chattering of innumerable birds and the steady humming of the insects as they sipped honey from the orchids and bell-shaped flowers of the lianas. I shook myself and stretched, much as an animal does on waking, to dispel the last vestiges of sleep, and looked up into the sky wondering what the day would bring forth. Then I descended the tree and joined my Gorilla friend at the bottom.

Male Gorilla sleep for the most part at the foot of trees, being too heavy to climb. They scoop out the dry soil round the spreading base and pull

the tangled undergrowth round them to form a screen. Then, squatting on their haunches and leaning against the bole of the tree, they sleep from sunset to sunrise. The females and youngsters, on the other hand, build nests in the low forks of trees. They sit on the strongest bough, stretch out their arms and pull towards them all the young twigs and leafy branches within reach, bending and twisting them under their massive bodies and flattening them with their weight. These primitive nests are only used once, the Gorilla making new beds every night. I have often noticed that when the apes are living in a family the old male of the troop always chooses a resting-place from which he has a good view of the trees where his wives and children have built their nests. Should any danger threaten they remain quietly crouching, while the male issues his awe-inspiring challenge to the intruder. These old males are very courageous in the protection of their kind, and if any of the family is attacked they send the females and youngsters up a tree for safety while they themselves prepare to do battle.

The females, being lighter and more active, move easily in the trees, and often travel from branch to branch and tree to tree in search of food. If they sight a particularly succulent bunch of fruits up aloft they climb after it and throw down the treasure to the old male waiting below. I was often able to render a similar service to my old friend, who was much too heavy to climb, but he



(By Courtesy of the World Wide Evangelisation Crusade)

THE ENTRANCE TO THE FOREST



JÉUAN DU BERRIE AND BO-BO

was always careful to wait until I had descended in order to share the prize with me.

Having rejoined my companion at the foot of the tree and received his usual demonstrations of affection, I waited while he performed his daily ritual of saluting the sun. Then together we wandered through the damp, steaming forest in search of something to eat. We turned over leaves in the hope of finding insects, grubs and caterpillars, a form of diet which was not always palatable to me, but which my companion seemed to regard as a great delicacy. We chewed the leaves and fruit of the banana, my companion having a great fondness for the inner lining of white pith which tasted, in my opinion, extremely bitter. Often, too, he would swallow the whole skin. Wild celery, dock, tender ferns and bamboo were also fine treasures, and it gave me great satisfaction to hear the smacking noise which he made with his wide protruding lips as he crunched the shoots between his teeth. I am led to believe that the wide spaces between the mighty teeth of the Gorilla are caused by eating bamboos, the stiff canes becoming wedged between the canines and pushing them apart. In common with many other animals, Gorilla suffer from caries of the teeth and bone, but my friend was a magnificent specimen, and gave no sign that his teeth were softening or decaying. I felt quite sure that he would retain the power of his jaw for many a long year.

So we journeyed daily through the forest in

search of food. The plant life in Equatorial Africa is truly amazing, and I often envy people who have made a study of tropical flora, and wish that I had had their knowledge when I started out on my travels. Every plant had its own colour, every leaf was different to the touch, and it was amazing to think that some of the giant trees had lived, and would go on living, for hundreds of years, and that they hibernated in the winter-time as though they were reptiles.

Nor was I ever tired of watching the extraordinary diversity of insects. The mechanism of these tiny, often microscopic, creatures was astounding, and the colours which were absorbed into their transparent wings from the rays of the sun were truly magnificent. People have often wondered what part such seemingly useless things play in the world. But when I saw and marvelled at their beauty and their capabilities I realised that their creation was not so purposeless after all and that they had a definite place in the evolution of animated matter.

Thus I found much to occupy my attention as I penetrated the unknown jungle. My friend usually went a little ahead in case danger threatened, and I marvelled at the quietness of his movements. In spite of the tangled undergrowth, the clambering lianas and twining brambles, he pushed his colossal bulk through with extraordinary ease and without making scarcely a sound. Inevitably I lagged behind a little, having no thick hair on my arms and legs

to protect me from the thorns, and being forced therefore to pick my way with more care. But he always waited for me to come up with him, and if I was too laggardly, called for me to hurry. Usually on his daily wanderings he walked on all fours, placing the knuckles of his hands and the soles of his feet on the ground, but sometimes he would assume an erect posture, grasping the trees and bushes to help him along. Often he would stretch out a long, hairy arm to reach after some succulent fruit or brightly coloured berry, or peer curiously between the thick vegetation to see if I was following. The view that I generally had of him, just before the bushes closed together after he had passed through them, was of a shaggy back, jet-black save for a sprinkling of grey and grizzled hairs on the shoulders, and a small head faintly tinged with red.

We continued our wanderings until about twelve noon, by which time the sun had reached its peak and made any travelling arduous and unpleasant. Then we found a shady place in which to take our siesta. The Gorilla would sit propped against a smooth trunk, much as he did at night, and draw the leaves and twigs over him like a blanket, while I would climb into the fork if I was inclined to sleep or else stay with him at the foot and observe the teeming life around. Sometimes I would watch the termite ant as it built its wonderful nest, and stand amazed at its ability in constructing such an intricate home. These ants are remarkable creatures ; they are

able to determine before birth the sex and nature of the embryo, and decide whether the young ant shall be a queen, a bunghead, a drone, a soldier or a worker, although under the microscope the eggs appear to be similar. I am no authority on their habits, having obtained my knowledge of them solely from observation in the forest, but I am told that this difference of nature and sex in the embryo is achieved by various substances on which the grubs are fed.

Sometimes, too, I would sit on a fallen tree-trunk and watch two snails making love. The idea may seem ludicrous, and yet even in the lowest forms of animal life the mating season calls for extravagant behaviour. The male snail circles round the female, watching her every movement and displaying to her his long, arching neck and smoothly patterned shell. She, in her turn, acts coyly and behaves as though completely unaware of his presence. In this way every living creature seeks for an affinity in order to carry on the species.

There were plenty of other things, too, to occupy me each day while my companion slumbered peacefully in the shade. I was greatly interested in the numerous lizards and alligators that basked in the sun and lay in the muddy streams, and I have always been fascinated by the death-dealing adders, mambas and other poisonous snakes. I have kept many of them in captivity, but seeing them behind glass cases gives no conception of their proper habits and capabilities.

To the uninitiated they seem sleepy, sluggish creatures, for ever curled up dully in the corner of their cages ; but in the forest they move with the rapidity and dexterity of electricity. The eye can scarcely perceive the way in which they dart upon their victims.

For amusement I used to play with the lizards as they came out of their holes and lay blinking at the bright sun. I would pluck a long stalk of wild grass, pick off the seeds, and make a small noose at the thin end. Then I would put a little spittle on the noose, and, holding the grass by the thick end, warily push it out towards the lizard. If I kept very still, insinuating the noose further and further forward, it was surprising how many of the little creatures I was able to catch. As they darted out their fork-like tongues to lick the shining drop of spittle I was able to slip the noose over their scaly heads, and so they would be trapped. Sometimes as I picked them up gently they would wriggle away and escape, leaving their tails behind in my hand, for Nature has endowed them with the power of shedding this member if anyone catches hold of it. But unless it was imperative that I obtained some fat to protect myself from the insect scourge I had no desire to hurt the little creatures, and so I let them go.

So passed a typical siesta in the jungle. When the heat of the sun had waned a little we arose, as if by mutual consent, and began a slow return to the place where I had fashioned my tree-top home.

Gorilla rarely travel over the same paths day after day, even though one family will patrol the same area for many months. But I had got into the habit of returning to my eyrie each night, for it had become a sort of home to me, and I found to my great delight that my old friend was not averse from returning with me. There were, however, few marked tracks except those that led down to a water-hole, and we never knew whether we were journeying over familiar or unfamiliar ground.

It might be that on the homeward way we came across a family of apes, also travelling through the forest and gathering food. We would hear them grunting and clucking before we actually sighted them, and then suddenly we would come upon them. Immediately they would stop feeding and look at us, to see if we were friends or foes. But the sight of one of their own kind seemed partly to reassure them, and after a time they continued their occupation of plucking roots and branches. We would talk to them for a little while, in a conversation of guttural grunts, but although they seemed quite pleased to see us they never made any protest when we showed signs of leaving them.

At length we reached the familiar clearing. It was now dusk and the mysterious sounds of night were beginning to be heard. For a moment we stood together, the Gorilla's hairy arm round my shoulders, while my fingers affectionately caressed his shaggy hide. Then he would begin searching for a comfortable place for the night, and having

found it would pull down the overhanging branches for his canopy. Soon he was completely screened from the eye of any intruder, and only a few contented grunts told me that he was there, ready to protect me if the need arose. I, meanwhile, climbed my tall tree, leaping from branch to branch until I had reached my hammock. Once there, I would lie down and meditate on my forest life, feeling an inexpressible joy at being so closely attuned to nature. The howls of the wild beasts sounded round me, but I was used to them at last and was not afraid. Gradually I drifted into slumber, my couch rocked by the gentle night breezes. So passed another day in the jungle.

CHAPTER VI

A FIGHT WITH A PYTHON

IN the African jungle danger lurks everywhere, and I never knew when my high resting-place would be invaded by a snake or a prowling leopard. But my Gorilla friends seemed to fear nothing. From day to day they moved contentedly through the forest, and even when hideous danger threatened and they escaped death only by the merest chance they appeared to be completely unperturbed.

There was only one beast in the jungle which the Gorilla thought it best to avoid and that was the vast elephant. For some reason, probably because of their huge bulk, my friends were anxious not to come into contact with the great pachyderms, and whenever we heard their hollow trumpetings echoing through the stillness of the forest we slunk off and waited until they had gone on their destructive way. Often as I lay in my eyrie I would hear them come trumpeting and screaming through the jungle beneath me, and watch them as they plucked up trees and herbage in their path. Sometimes too, I would see them wallowing in the mud of a water-hole and squirting the water in great refreshing streams over their wrinkled hides.

One morning I awoke as usual at the break of dawn. The sky was streaked with faint bars of crimson and yellow, and a pale mist floated lazily round the tree-tops, through which the first golden rays of the sun pierced down like shining arrows into the clearing. The scene was so beautiful that had I been able to paint it people would have said it was an artist's dream and not reality. I descended from my nest to rejoin my faithful old friend at the foot of the tree. He was propped on his haunches against the gnarled trunk, and opened his little deep-set soft brown eyes as I neared him and greeted me affectionately, gazing into my face and putting his hairy arm round my shoulder in a mighty embrace. Then he left me and walked out into the middle of the clearing to salute the rising sun. I had seen this wonderful sight many times before, but I was never tired of watching it and wondering what was the reason behind the extraordinary performance. The Gorilla moved out into the grassy glade, until the sun shone full upon him, and then sank on all four feet and bowed his head so that his crest touched the ground. Then he stood upright, clasped both hands across his breast, threw his head back and roared with such fervour that the earth vibrated with the mighty sound.

His homage over, my friend returned and, taking my arm, set off with me through the forest. Travelling through the matted jungle was very arduous, and we were never able to go for any great distances. Moreover, we were continually

stopping to gather food, searching for succulent roots, or turning over stones and decayed branches in the hope of finding fat grubs and insects. The Gorilla are for the most part vegetarians, and now that I had joined them and lived with them I found my diet much extended. At meal times I chewed what they chewed and kept strong and well on it. Roots, wild plantains and various berries formed the principal part of our daily menu, and also a number of leaves and plants which I had not before discovered to be edible. I found that the pith and sap of many of the things that they chewed was extremely beneficial, and after I had begun eating with the Gorilla I never ate anything which disagreed with me.

If only it were possible to find out the nature of these beneficial substances which the great anthropoid apes eat in their wild state I am sure that it would be quite possible to keep them in compounds in captivity and breed successfully from them. But without these substances fertility and the urge to breed seem to be absent, and so the majority of men are unable to make the acquaintance of these mighty and magnificent beasts. How great a tragedy it is, too, that the approach of white men and civilisation should eventually be the means of exterminating the wonderful creatures. Now that I am back in the midst of those men and that civilisation I rejoice to hear that in some parts of the Belgian and French Congo the Gorilla is being protected. If only men would respect Nature instead of desecrating and

destroying all that is fine and beautiful how much better the world would be!

Meanwhile I was living as close to Nature as a man can ever get, and I felt, as I still do feel, that it was the only life really worthwhile. On this beautiful morning my friend and I had been wandering farther afield than usual, and were in a part of the forest that to my knowledge I had not explored before. Suddenly the Gorilla made the sharp, high-pitched bark which signalises a discovery. He was a little in front of me at the time, and when I caught up with him I discovered the meaning of his cry. He had come upon a family of Gorilla eating in a grove of wild sugarcane. The plantation was probably the relic of some native habitation, and as the apes have a very sweet tooth the find was a great luxury for them. The cluckings of the family were ecstatic, and I could not repress a smile as I saw them wandering amongst the canes, their great black heads bobbing up and down.

My friend and I approached them, eating as we came. I was content to suck one or two pieces, but he pulled the canes up by the roots and ate not only the cane but some of the root also. Gradually we approached the other apes, as they chewed and grunted. They were very wary, even of one of their own kind, and ran a hundred yards away if we came too close, returning in a little while to continue their sweet meal. At length I was almost able to touch them, my friend keeping always at a respectable distance in case of acci-

dents. Although he was old and his strength was going I knew very well that if any of the others had attempted to harm me he would have died fighting at my side.

His loyalty to me was to be demonstrated that very night, in the sequel to an adventure which was even now about to take place. It so happened that in her joy at finding this treasure of sugar one of the mothers had placed her baby on the ground. Suddenly the little one gave a shrill squeal of fear. All the Gorilla immediately gathered round, as they always will when one of their young is threatened, no matter what is the assailant. In this case it was an enormous python, some fifteen feet long, which had crawled up in the cane grove unperceived by us. Evidently it was hungry and had thought the young Gorilla easy prey, but now, faced by a party of six huge Gorilla, animals which even snakes acknowledge as King of the Jungle, it decided to sheer off.

But here I decided to take a hand. I had my Maltese knife with me, and as the shining reptile undulated over the rough ground I flung it with all my strength at the snake's head. I struck it on the side, just below the right eye. For a moment it was stunned and that gave the Gorilla a chance of attack. In the twinkling of an eye they had surged forward, and my friend was on the snake's back, his teeth gripped fast in the scaly neck, and though the python lashed its huge body furiously about in an effort to twine itself about the Gorilla it was soon evident that those

mighty canines would never be dislodged. Though the snake put up a strenuous resistance it weakened at length and I was able to finish it off with a blow in the right eye with my knife.

The Gorilla wandered back into the sugar-cane, apparently quite undisturbed by the hideous danger that they had just escaped. Only the mother of the unfortunate youngster seemed a little concerned. She picked him up and clasped him tightly to her breast, holding him tightly with one hairy hand. Then she began to munch once more, as though she had dismissed the matter finally from her mind.

I, meanwhile, stayed by the dead python, wondering at its beautiful markings and thinking of the enormous power that now lay useless. After some musing I decided that there was no point in wasting so valuable a skin, so I started to slit away as much of it as I could well carry, thinking that when I was back in my tree-top house I should be able to find some use for it.

The task was a bigger one than I had at first anticipated, and I worked steadily at the gruesome occupation for several hours. The Gorilla, having eaten their fill of sugar-cane, gathered round to watch and, from the expressions which I thought that I read on their faces, they seemed none too happy about this operation of mine.

At last the task was finished and I had a large piece of superb snakeskin cleaned and packed for transit to my "home." The others started a brisk return and seemed rather to avoid me and

my burden. Gradually I lagged behind, and as I did so I was interested to see the quandary in which my friend was placed. He did not wish to leave me, but he disliked my burden ; besides, he would have preferred to accompany the others of his kind. He was continually forging ahead with the Gorilla family and then waiting impatiently for me to catch up. When I reached my tree and prepared to climb up and leave the skin on the top platform ready for my attempt at curing the next day, he seemed reluctant to leave me, and I was surprised to find that he wanted to come up with me, a thing he rarely did. He was extremely heavy, and as he began his climb, grunting and puffing as he did so, I could not help contrasting this somewhat undignified performance with the grace and strength he displayed on the ground. As he mounted higher and higher the boughs creaked ominously, and small twigs and bits of bark fell to the earth. When at length, to my great relief, he arrived safely in the fork, he made several demonstrations of affection, continually rubbing his teeth on my arm, grasping me by the shoulder and bringing his face close to mine. If he had closed his jaws he would have crushed my face into pulp, but I felt quite confident of his love, and knew great pleasure as the heat of his body beat against my naked limbs and his hot breath enveloped my face. After this exchange of affection we stretched ourselves out to rest after our long and eventful walk.

Once again the heavy tropical darkness closed

down over us like a blanket. Close at hand sounded the howls of hungry animals and the hoarse, disappointed bark of a leopard that had sprung and missed its kill. But for once the nightmare noises had no power to disturb my nerves for I had this night a stalwart protector near me. I had only to stretch out my arm to bury my hand in the shaggy hair of his back. I was on the verge of sleep when suddenly I was conscious that he had quietly risen and was looking down over the edge of the leafy platform. The hair on his crest rose, and as the moonlight filtered through the leaves I saw that his face was convulsed with rage, and yet he remained perfectly silent. Evidently some great danger was approaching.

Curiosity drove me to peer over the edge of the platform likewise. At first, looking into the black depths, I could see nothing, but as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom I saw a steady movement round the trunk of the tree in which we were seated, and heard a dull, slithering noise. It was an enormous python, larger even than the monster which we had killed that very day. In a flash I realised that this was the mate, come to avenge the death. Cases have been known where these large snakes have tracked the killer as far as sixty miles, but this one had only needed to follow us five or six.

Our position was indeed desperate. The lucky chance which had led to our victory of the morning could not be repeated, for the darkness and the intertwining branches of the tree made a steady

aim impossible. Our only chance of escape rested on the strength and courage of the great Gorilla, and I glanced at him to see whether he seemed about to make an attack. He was watching the movements of the snake carefully, and I could not help admiring him again, as he stood silhouetted against the moonlight. He was indeed King of Beasts, and as I looked him up and down my fear left me, for it seemed impossible that this magnificent creature should be overcome, even by the great snake that was gradually coming nearer and nearer. But I was still puzzled to know how the fight would begin and how my champion would manage on this rickety perch forty feet above the ground.

He had his own plan, however. During those few interminable minutes of waiting his brain, although small, must have been working actively as he figured out his method of campaign. He allowed the python to come up as far as the lower platform. Then, after balancing himself for a moment on the branch which formed the edge of our platform, he let himself fall forward upon the snake. His powerful legs gripped its neck before it had any knowledge of this sudden attack, and then both of them crashed through the frail framework of lianas and creepers, and I heard the bodies hurtling through the leaves and branches on their rapid descent to the ground.

For one hideous moment I thought that this was the end of my pal. Was it possible for a beast weighing some thirty stone to fall all that distance

and not be dashed to death at the bottom of the tree? I started to descend and find out if my worst fears were realised, forgetting all about the python in my anxiety for my friend, but as I began dropping from bough to bough my doubts were dispelled by the mighty roar which rang like thunder through the forest. He was alive and challenging his foe! I hastened my descent in order to give him what help I could in this fierce fight.

I reached the ground to find that the battle was already over. Whether the powerful feet of the Gorilla had squeezed the life out of the python in the descent, or whether he had bitten into its neck and so made the vital wound I was not to know. But there was my friend dancing in ungovernable fury on the snake's head, roaring and beating his breast. The still-writhing coils of the python hung from the lower branches of the tree, but the whole head was being rapidly reduced to pulp and was being driven into the earth by the weight of the enraged Gorilla. I had seen some feats of strength in the forest already, and I had witnessed some terrible fights, but never had I imagined that I would see such a swift and decisive victory of Beast over Reptile. As I watched him tearing his prey into the smallest fragments I could not but acknowledge him Lord of the Jungle, and breathe a prayer of thankfulness that I was his friend and not his foe.

That night until the dawn broke we slept side by side at the foot of the tree. And when at length

the light began to filter through the branches and the insects woke and began their ceaseless humming, I opened my eyes to find a shaggy arm thrown affectionately across my shoulders, and only the tattered snakeskin on the trodden ground to show how I had been saved from death only a few short hours before.

CHAPTER VII

MY MONKEY FRIENDS

AFTER being saved from the terrible coils of the python my life in the forest relapsed into its usual routine again. I was often lonely, for the Gorilla are not gregarious animals. Even my friend would sometimes vanish for days on end, and, though I used to call for him continually, I could find no trace of him. There were times when I pushed my way through the jungle for hours without seeing a sign of animal life. The whole forest seemed deserted, save for the inevitable insects and the screeching birds, and I know from experience that it is quite possible to penetrate the whole length and depth of the Gorilla country without meeting a single Gorilla.

There were days, however, when luck seemed to be with me and I came across many of the mighty anthropoids to relieve my loneliness. At each meeting I was subjected to the usual searching sniffs and pinches, but I never had trouble with any one of them. It soon became evident to me, in spite of the comparative rarity of these encounters, that there was a large company of Gorilla in the Gaboon country, but that they had no tribal or communal life, existing as separate

individuals or, during the mating season, in small families. These families consisted generally of one old male, two or three females and their young ones. They will remain together for some years, the male obviously in charge and defending his wives and children from attack, until some adventurous young male is bold enough to make a raid and carry off one or all of the females. The old male, dethroned from his kingship, then becomes solitary and roams through the forest alone. I had thought at first that my friend would want to stay with his family, but strangely enough he seemed to prefer my company to theirs, and he appeared to have relinquished his rule to the young male whom he had fought on my behalf. At any rate, we rarely saw the family after my first few weeks of living with them, and my pal and I went on our way together.

But in spite of his companionship he often left me alone, as I have said, and slowly the idea grew in my brain that I might call together all the Gorilla of the district into a council. No doubt it was loneliness that drove me to this decision, for man is essentially a gregarious animal and it was natural for me to revolt against a state of solitude and seek a company with which to fraternise at times. In the back of my mind there was, I believe, some idea that through my human intelligence I might organise the Gorilla into a band and with the help of my faithful friend become some sort of leader. Ambition cannot be repressed even in the forest, and, though I would now deprecate any such

attempt to alter the natural habits of the great apes, I have no doubt that some such intention was the motive for my subsequent actions, though it was a motive that I did not acknowledge even to myself.

The difficulties which I had to face were enormous. The Gorilla were not used to meeting together in great numbers, as I have said, and I did not know how they would react even if I succeeded in the difficult task of getting them to congregate in one of the larger clearings. For all I knew they might be hostile to each other and begin an immense and bloody civil war. Or they might all suddenly turn against me, the only stranger amongst them, and tear me to pieces. But I had now spent over ten months with the Gorilla, and I felt that some experiment was well worth the risk. I began my plans accordingly.

My preparations lasted several days. I knew that the only way to influence the Gorilla was through their stomachs, and so I made a great store of all the food that I knew they liked best. I collected roots and hid them in caches, concealed a huge supply of plantains, berries and guavas in big leaves near my tree, made a collection of grubs and beetles and penned them up in my python skin. The skin, incidentally, I had failed to cure properly, having no fire in which to smoke it, but it came in very useful for this purpose. I could not guess what the answer to my invitation would be, but I knew that the only way to avoid trouble was to see that all the guests who came should

have a sufficiency of food. So it was that I laboured ceaselessly for many days to lay in my supply of delicacies, until finally I had enough food ready for thirty or more Gorilla. If more came I should have to risk putting them on short rations.

When my preparations were complete I began to issue the invitations. By this time I could manage the short, sharp bark of the Gorilla very well. In fact, when I was recently asked to take my chimpanzees to make a sound film, I found that I could make the noises so naturally that no one was able to distinguish whether the noises came from the animals or from me.

The language of the Gorilla consists of about ten different sounds. The tooth and mouth formation of the animals makes it impossible for them to enunciate, and so they are limited to a number of cries. I was soon able to distinguish between these cries, for they vary enormously in pitch and intonation. But to attempt a description of them on paper is another matter. There is, for instance, the mating call which begins as a low rumble and rises to a high-pitched whine. In the mating season the males roam through the forest in search of the females, and every few minutes they throw back their heads and utter the long-drawn-out, mournful cry. Then there is the cry of fear, a terrifically high-pitched, almost diabolical screech, similar to the scream of a hysterical child, but about fifty times greater in volume. The cry of joy, the sound which the apes make when they chance upon some choice food or when they are

playing happily together, is a mixture between a grunt and a cluck, rising and falling and somewhat resembling the bark of a small pup. There were other cries, too ; the sound of sorrow, the call of discovery, and the mighty and awe-inspiring roar of battle and greeting to the sun, which I have attempted to describe elsewhere.

So with my friend at my side I went out into the middle of the clearing and began to call. I made the loud, whining cluck, which the lonely Gorilla utters when he is searching for his own kind, and which the males make when they wish to round up their band of females. My friend soon joined in, and our two voices rang through the forest.

The response soon came. One by one the great giants came pounding through the trees to see what was happening. At first they were timid ; they peeped through the tangled undergrowth, shuffled warily away, and then returned. I continued to call to them, and at length they managed to overcome their caution sufficiently to leave the protection of the trees. I had banked on their curiosity bringing them, and as soon as they arrived I began distributing the food in order to keep them there. When they were settled down on their haunches around me I began the cry again, and more Gorilla answered it until at last the clearing was filled and I had not less than thirty Gorilla assembled. I can claim to have seen more Gorilla together in their native state than any man living.

They were sitting almost in a circle around me, clucking and munching their food, while I sat cross-legged in the middle, chewing a piece of sugar-cane. After a time a great dark female approached, quivering and stroking her sides and obviously wanting to be friends. I put out my hand to touch her, and she knocked it away and backed timidly, only to return a few minutes later. I made a little chattering noise, hoping to soothe her, and eventually, as she turned her back, I ran my fingers through her shaggy hair and caressed her.

When the feeding was over the games began. The sport of these monsters was a terrific spectacle to watch. Blows were exchanged that would seemingly have felled a giant, and yet these beasts appeared hardly to notice them. Some concealed themselves in the lower branches of trees and as an unwary playmate passed beneath they let down a hind leg and yanked him up off the ground, a feat of strength which needs to be seen to be believed. The noise was tremendous, echoing through the forest and scaring the smaller creatures so that they would not venture within miles of us.

For some hours I romped with the Gorilla in that clearing under the hot African sun. They treated me quite as one of themselves, aiming great blows at me in the way of friendship, which, had I been unable to avoid them, would have laid me out on the grass a corpse. It was only when I picked up a stick or stone that they showed signs of displeasure, and I have noticed this same

reaction with Gorilla and Chimpanzees in captivity. Whenever a man brandishes a stick the animals are immediately on the defensive. But I had no wish to annoy them ; they were my friends and my guests. So I played with them, and not once during the whole time did I see one of the ferocious outbursts of temper of which the apes are capable. They needed to be kept amused all the time, in the same way that small children do ; life for them had to be kept in constant motion ; but as long as they played and ate they were happy.

At length, as the sun's rays grew to their hottest and our energy ebbed, these hideous yet likeable friends of mine sauntered off into the forest for their siesta. One by one they shambled off into the cool depths, leaving me alone with my faithful companion. All the forest fell silent ; even the littlest insect was hushed. And as I climbed my tree and settled down to my own rest I felt well pleased at the happy hours that I had spent with my host of friends.

After that marvellous experience I used to call a council of Gorilla about once a week, just for the pleasure of having the mighty anthropoids around me. There were always some who responded to my call, and seemed grateful for the food which I provided for them, and I found that at length my loneliness was a thing of the past.

One of the most surprising things about the Gaboon country was the comparative absence of the larger carnivora, and especially of other members of the ape family. Presumably they had

all been driven away by the Gorilla. I had hoped that perhaps some Chimpanzees would come in answer to my call, but apparently they dared not approach their larger cousins, for I never saw one within miles of the Gorilla district.

There does not seem to be a great deal of difference in structure between the Gorilla and his cousin the Chimpanzee. The chimpanzee, of course, is built on a much smaller scale : a full grown one in the forest would probably never weigh more than eleven stone, whereas a full grown male Gorilla often reaches the colossal amount of seven hundred pounds. The Gorilla has a larger barrelled chest, and the semblance of a calf muscle which seems to be entirely lacking in the chimpanzee ; and the head crest, which nature seems to have provided to protect the Gorilla from the effect of blows on the skull, is also not found on the smaller animal.

But what the chimpanzee lacks in build he makes up in intelligence. I have seen and studied both species in captivity and in their wild state, and although there are exceptions to every rule and I would never hope to find a more intelligent or affectionate beast than my old Gorilla pal, I would never hesitate to say that the chimpanzee is the more intelligent of the two animals. Even *his* brain, however, is limited. He will learn many things up to a certain age, and learn them very quickly too, but then nature calls a halt and he does not seem capable of grasping any more. In the wild state the brain is chiefly needed to enable the chimpanzee to protect himself and to find food ;

there is no necessity for reasoning power and so the ape has not got it.

I have tested the intelligence of both animals and find some specimens much cleverer than others. I have often been told that the male chimpanzee is better than the female for the purpose of training, but in my opinion no rule can be made about it. I have often found that the females are equally intelligent and not nearly so spiteful. There is one thing of which I am quite convinced ; if we humans had taken as much notice of apes, of Gorilla and chimpanzees, as we have of dogs, if we had taken the same trouble to domesticate them and accustom them to different conditions and climates, they would now be walking about with the same intelligence and reasoning power as humans of fifteen or sixteen years of age. For I have found that in my many years of living with and for animals it is surprising what wonderful reasoning faculties they display.

I have kept many monkeys as pets, some of whom I still have with me, and with whom I am able to relive my happy years in the jungle. There is Bunty, a large female chimpanzee. For two years running she suffered from double pneumonia, and while she was ill I used to sleep with her in my bed and give her the warmth of my body. I know that this companionship and sympathy helped more in curing her than any drug or medicine with which I am acquainted. She certainly appreciated it, and loved me so much that when I left her she would cry and whine for me to

return. Then I have a little fellow called Peter who is very quick to learn tricks. He seems to understand every word that I say to him, and it is really enchanting to see him balance an orange on the end of his nose. But neither of these animals can be compared to my chimpanzee Bo-Bo. He surpasses in intelligence any monkey that I have ever seen. He rides his own little bicycle, wears clothes, baths himself, plays football, turns back somersaults, and switches the electric light off and on. He is able to sit up at a table using a knife and fork, and although only four years old, and an animal too, he handles the implements with as great a dexterity as a child of five.

I have also a pair of mandrills, Jack and Jenny, the only pair of these animals to be handled in captivity. Mandrills are the most ferocious members of the monkey tribe, and certainly the most ugly. Eminent zoologists have told me that these fierce beasts can never be tamed, and yet every day I go to their den, open it, and let them feed from my hand. Nor do they make any attempt to escape. A little while ago I wanted to demonstrate my capabilities in this direction to Sir David Ezra, the well-known zoologist, but when I went to open the cage he begged me not to do so.

"Please don't open the door!" he cried. "He'll knock you down and escape!"

But not Jack! He has the greatest respect for me, because he has never known anything but kindness from me. The love that I have for him is reflected in the love that he has for me. We both

understand each other ; we are both in sympathy and in tune with nature. I think that I am the only man who has ever attempted, and probably will ever attempt, to handle a full grown male mandrill. But when one understands these creatures it is soon evident that they really mean no harm. Should they attempt to bite it is best to stand one's ground, for if they see no fear in man they will have no fear themselves. Nearly all animals use their teeth only when they are on the defensive or through sheer nervousness.

I have called these monkeys my friends. I have even said that my faithful old Gorilla pal in the forest was the best friend that I have ever had. And this is not an exaggeration. The friendship of human beings has never meant very much to me ; men lie and sneer and betray. But the love of my monkeys has been the one great joy of my existence, and nothing will ever equal those happy days when I lived with my good old friends in the depths of the African jungle.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPTURED AS THE MISSING LINK

I HAVE now come to the saddest part of this history of my life in the vast and unexplored forests of Africa. For there came a day when my Gorilla friend was killed, shot by the hand of a marauding white man, and I was ignominiously captured, bound to a pole, and brought back for a time to the civilisation to which I had vowed I would never return.

On the morning of that fateful day I awoke and descended as usual to my friend. But instead of greeting me joyously, as was his custom, he seemed strange and listless, as though some pre-knowledge told him that his end was approaching. He put his arm round my shoulders and gripped me tight, looking into my face and trying to convey to me some meaning which I could not understand. Afterwards it seemed to me that he was bidding me farewell, and when at night I sometimes dream of him and remember that friendly squeeze I wake up feeling lonely indeed.

But at the time I was quite unable to account for his behaviour. I tried to restore his usual light-heartedness by teasing him and getting him to play, but my efforts evoked no response. Instead

of romping on ahead, as he had always done before, he seemed reluctant to leave my side, and soon he conveyed his depression to me also, so that we both pushed our way through the forest in an atmosphere of restraint and disquiet.

My curiosity had long been aroused by the stream which pursued its sluggish course not far from the clearing where I had built my eyrie. I was anxious to find its source and penetrate farther towards the mountains, where I felt that there would be an entry into the even more thickly vegetated parts of the jungle. I felt that such an expedition would cheer up our unaccountably waning spirits, and so I began to make my way upstream, wading in the shallower water when that was possible, and suffering the stench of decaying vegetation as best I could. My friend accompanied me on the bank.

The going was extremely hard, and I had to keep a wary eye open for the crocodiles who lay in the shallow pools, camouflaging themselves as logs of wood. So after ploughing my way along for about two hours I halted and rejoined my friend in order to find some fruit and have a brief rest. We ate together quietly, sharing our choicer morsels. My friend was always considerate in the extreme, and would often watch my face to see that I was satisfied with my food. As we munched and chewed he took my arm in his great hands and ran his fingers up and down, as if marvelling at its smoothness. Then again he enfolded me in a mighty embrace and looked mournfully into my eyes.

The meal ended, I climbed the great tree at whose base we had been resting, in order to see something of the lie of the land. The tree, as usual, was thickly hung with clambering lianas, which were slowly but very surely choking its life out. These made the climb fairly easy, but when I reached the tops of the surrounding trees I found that I could see nothing of the ground below, nor could I catch a single glimpse of my friend. I gazed towards the east, straining to see the distant mountains, but there was nothing but a monotony of trees. The air was fresh at that early hour, for it was scarcely eight o'clock, and everything seemed at peace with the world and each other. So I waited, feeling the breeze on my face and gazing over the fair green expanse below me, when suddenly I heard a sound most horrible to my ears.

It was the sound of a shot.

My immediate impulse was to stay where I was. My friend, I thought, would make good his escape and I would join him later. The men, whoever they were, would not think of climbing a tree, so there was no danger of my being found. They must, I decided, be white traders travelling up or down the stream on whose banks we were, for I doubted if any natives so far in the interior would have been able to acquire any guns. Probably the traders had been pushing through the unfamiliar country and had somehow become separated. The shot was a summons to bring the party together.

So I accounted for the hateful sound as I

crouched high up in the forest giant. No sound followed it, no noise of crackling undergrowth, of shouts, or of an angry Gorilla. I had no clue as to what had happened to my friend.

Minute followed minute and still there was no sound except the humming of insects and the occasional hoarse cry of a bird. The men, I decided, were not coming my way or I should have heard more of them by this time, so I began to descend from my lofty fork. I was troubled in mind about my friend, for even the King of Beasts can be subdued by one small bullet.

As I dropped through the lianas with the agility that I had learned in the forest, I saw that he was still sitting at the bottom of the tree, propped against the trunk as I had left him. Although he must have been well aware of the danger, and would in normal circumstances have been miles away by now and safe in the impenetrable depths of the forest, he had refused to desert me. I decided that I must do all in my power to get him out of harm's way.

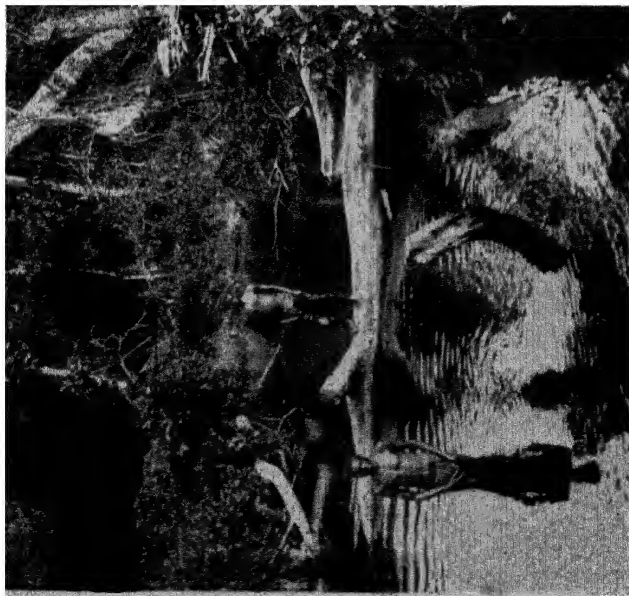
Moving quietly amongst the long, matted grass, we headed away from the stream and from the direction from which the sound of the shot had come. We went as quickly as the darkness of the forest and the thickness of the undergrowth would permit, and though my friend could have out-distanced me easily had he wished he preferred to stay by me and await my slower progress. My heart was glad, as I believed that we were rapidly leaving the dangerous vicinity of the white men,

and I realised that there was in me a deep hostility for my own kind.

But my hopes were summarily shattered. All at once another shot rang out immediately in front of us, possibly an answering signal to the first. My friend, startled by the closeness of the unusual sound and realising that danger was near, uttered a great and fearsome roar. His crest rose up on his head, and he began to beat his breast and bellow out the challenge of the Gorilla.

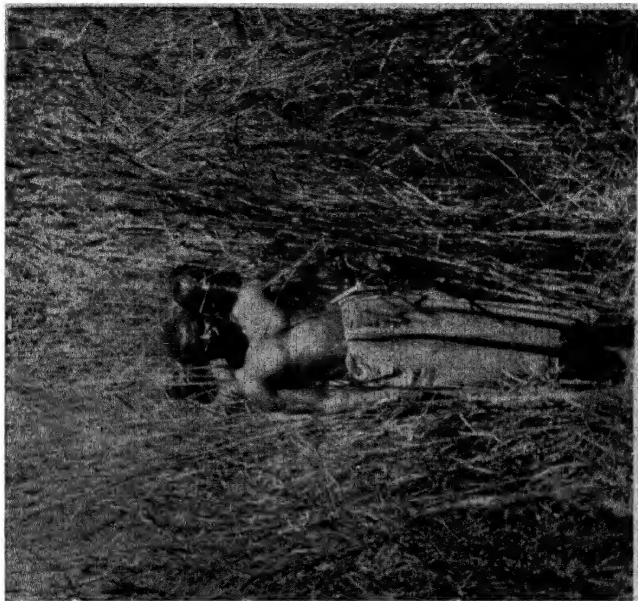
Shouts came in answer to this roar, and I judged that there was a party of eight or nine men, some of whom were white. I gripped my friend by the arm and started to drag him away. But luck abandoned me. We ran into a clearing where I thought we should make good progress across the short grass. But even as the welcome darkness of the trees at the far end seemed about to close around us a third shot rang out and I heard the impact of the bullet in my friend's body.

He gave an almost human groan and sagged over me, falling on his face on the ground. I knelt down beside his body, caring not at all that these men might murder me as they had murdered him. I placed my hand on his heart and found that it was still beating, but even as hope began to revive there was another shot, and I felt a fierce pain in my left ankle and a sudden paralysis in the whole leg. Yelling and screaming I struggled to get up and help my wounded friend, but before I was able to rise I was seized by a number of men ; my hands were thrust behind me and I was bound with



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FORCING A WAY THROUGH THE UNDERGROWTH

leather thongs. No man ever made as fierce a struggle for freedom as I did then. I kicked and used my teeth, I tried to elude my captors and make a dash for the safety of the matted undergrowth, I cursed and groaned and wept and tried to tell them to let me go. The glimpse which I had, during this nightmare fight, of my friend in his dying convulsions forced me to battle on and nearly broke my heart. But with my hands bound behind me, and my left leg useless I had no chance against them. At length the burning pain in my ankle and the bitter anguish of my heart proved too much for me. I lost consciousness.

How long I was in this state I do not know. I awoke to the knowledge that I was bound hand and foot. I opened my eyes and they encountered brown wood immediately above them. I shut them again and endeavoured to think out this strange phenomenon. My body was swinging rhythmically from side to side, and, from the smell, I judged that I was in close proximity to two or more negroes.

Then I realised what was happening. I had been tied tightly to a long pole as though I were a wild animal, and was being carried through the forest by natives. There was a glowing fire in my ankle, and the leather thongs which bound me cut deeply into my legs and wrist and waist. I am able to endure a great deal of physical pain, but now I was weak from loss of blood, and overcome with despair. After bearing the discomfort for some time I again fainted away.

So we journeyed through the jungle, and I was

in a state of semi-consciousness most of the time. There were frequent halts for rest and refreshment, during which time I was placed on my side on the ground, still fastened to the pole. The traders sat round in a circle, drinking whisky from their flasks, talking and gesticulating. They spoke in a language which I recognised as Dutch, and from what I could gather in my more conscious moments they had decided that I was the Missing Link. There and then I made up my mind that I would not disillusion them, but would bide my time and attempt to effect an escape as soon as my ankle was sufficiently healed to bear my weight.

Meanwhile I decided to eavesdrop in order to find out who my captors were. My hair was long and hung well over my face, so that I could open my eyes without anyone noticing. Though the screen made it difficult for me to see what was going on all around me I was able to distinguish the four white men, who were sitting round their camp fire eating and talking. I was near enough to hear the conversation, and the fact that it was indeed Dutch confirmed my first impression of them. They were evidently Dutchmen who had got some trading rights in French territory. My knowledge of Dutch was not good, but I soon gathered that they were talking of the "wild man."

"We will keep him until his wound is better," said one who had his back to me, "and then we will sell him for big money on the coast."

"Then we shall be fools," returned the one opposite, a man with a great dirty beard and a

large sun-helmet perched on the back of his head. "Whether he is the Missing Link or not, that creature over there is a positive gold mine. We have only to ship him over to Europe to make any amount of money by exhibiting him at fairs and circuses. I suggest that we don't let him out of our hands."

This seemed to win general approval, and soon one of their number was deputed to attend to my wounded ankle. This was done roughly but well. . . . I lay quiet all the time, not wishing them to see that I was conscious, and then I began to think seriously about plans for escape. It was obvious that I could do nothing until my wound was better, so I decided to play the wild man as long as possible, and then make an attempt to return to my Gorilla friends.

At length we arrived at a native village, whose inhabitants appeared to know my captors, for they came out in troops to greet them, shouting and banging tom-toms. For the first time since my capture I was released from the pole, and was then taken to a native hut, given a drink and left on the floor. The hut was made of dried lalang grass and plantain leaves, and resembled more than anything the straw covering of a whisky bottle. It was conical in shape and tied at the top with rough bands of creeper. A round hole half-way up was the only means of entrance. The stench inside was horrible, so that I felt that I could hardly breathe.

Later, when I came into even closer contact with the African natives, I discovered that these kraals

sometimes become so nauseating that even their dirty occupants notice it, and then there is a general exodus to another part of the jungle. When all sign of mankind is gone, save for the derelict huts, nature starts her cleaning process, and the forest speedily recaptures the land so that in a year even one of the original inhabitants would find it very difficult to find his old home. The numerous "lungs" or clearings in the forest have probably at one time been native habitations.

Our stay in the village lasted for several days, and my captors spent much time trading beads and lengths of stuff for skins and ivory. The men realised that my ankle would not permit me to stray far, and so I was allowed to hobble through the village as I chose, although everywhere I went I was conscious of being in a prison of watchful eyes. The natives, I discovered, were lazy scoundrels who spent all their days eating, sleeping and hunting. They were great meat-eaters, but often did not seem to have enough food. One day, when I was lying outside my hut, one of them brought in an animal that he had shot. He flung it down on the trampled earth and immediately a horde of natives rushed from the kraals and flung themselves upon it, tearing at the flesh and seeming to wallow in the very vitals. Some of them ate so much of the meat that they could not possibly digest it all; their stomachs swelled up enormously and after a few days of dreadful pain they died.

After staying about a week in the midst of the dirt and stench of the village my captors at last

completed their wordy barterings, and left, laden with the rich spoils that they had acquired so cheaply from the ignorant and gullible savages. Once again I was slung to the pole and carried through the forest by the negroes ; once again I cudgelled my brain in an attempt to devise some means of escape. A wild idea of calling to my Gorilla friends for help passed through my mind, and more than once as I heard the roar of an ape echoing through the still forest I was on the point of giving the cry of fear, the cry which summons all Gorilla to the defence of their own kind. But I knew that such a call would only bring my friends into danger and almost certain death, and so I refrained. My wound, moreover, took a great while to heal, and before I could place my foot on the ground again we had reached a trading station on the coast.

My captors immediately put me for safety into a bamboo cage, and all the inhabitants of the station flocked round to stare at the strange animal which had been taken alive. The sight of them, and the semblance of civilisation which the station afforded me made me realise that the game was up. I resolved to make myself known.

So one morning as one of the traders came to my cage with food I said, speaking French : " Don't bother about that. I'll come out and eat it with you."

The consternation on the man's face was wonderful to behold, so that, in spite of my misery, I could not help laughing. He ran and summoned

the others, and after much chatter in their broken English and my poor Dutch and French I convinced them that I was no Missing Link, but a white man like themselves. I also made them realise that I wanted my freedom, that I had had enough of the pole and the bamboo cage and had no wish to be sold as a monstrosity to satisfy the idle curiosity of a crowd of sightseers.

They were morose enough at first as they saw their golden dreams disappearing, but after a time the humour of the situation began to dawn upon them. They brought me a broken piece of mirror and held it up before me. I did not recognise myself. I would never have believed that a human being could look as I looked then, with brown filthy face, matted hair and beard, and wild eyes. My wound had not improved my physical condition, and it was indeed a living replica of the wild man of the woods who stared back at me through the cracks of the broken glass.

But after a hair-cut, a bath and a shave, artificial performances which I disliked, but upon which my captors insisted before they would be convinced of my identity, I was once again a civilised being. And then the traders made a great fuss of me. They brought me the best food that the primitive station could produce; they ransacked the stores to obtain lint and ointments with which to bind my injured foot; they pressed gifts upon me as though to make compensation for the way they had treated me.

But although I realised that they were trying

to please me nothing could make me forget that I had been forcibly dragged away from my forest home, and that it was by the hand of these men that my Gorilla friend had been killed. Civilisation was unwelcome, even repellent to me, and often, living among my monkey friends, I had vowed that I would never return to it. So now, even while I remained with the men who had captured me, listening to their talk and allowing them to minister to my wound, I was laying my plans and counting the days until I could return once more to my wild life in the forest.

CHAPTER IX

LIFE AT THE TRADING STATION

IT took nine months for my wound to heal. Presumably the crude methods which the traders adopted, the fumbling way in which they probed for the bullet, and the total lack of any proper sort of disinfectant or antiseptic, did much to account for this long period of convalescence. At any rate, for the first three months I could do little more than hobble about the place with a pair of primitive crutches. Even when the ankle did begin steadily to improve I felt too weak to think of returning at once to the precarious life of the jungle, where the weakest goes always to the wall. So I determined to bide my time until I was fit enough once more to seek the haunts of my Gorilla friends.

The trading station to which I had been brought was primitive in the extreme. Unlike some of the large stations, which are filled always with the busy hum of civilisation and seem as far removed from the jungle which fringes them as I felt then from Malta, it was almost untouched by the hand of the white man, save, of course, for the inevitable drinking-house on the quayside. It was composed of a few huts, built of anything which the owners

could lay their hands on : pieces of driftwood, odd bits of iron, lengths of coco-nut matting. There was no stone road, only a path trodden in the earth by the constant passage of naked and shambling feet. And everywhere there were smells, and filth, and clusters of ugly black faces that made me heartily homesick for the forest.

The main building in the village was, of course, the drinking-house, where " snake-bite " and " fire-water," Africa's two most potent beverages, were brewed for the traders and the unsuspecting natives. The place was, quite literally, a den of vice. During my nine months' sojourn in the station I witnessed more drunken riots there than in any other tavern that I have visited before or since. The traders were rarely sober, and they even conducted their business in an advanced state of intoxication, which boded ill for a native if he attempted to protest at the unfairness of a price. When they were too drunk to take any more, the men would give the remaining liquor to any captive monkey that happened to be about the place, and the room would shake with their boisterous guffaws as they watched the poor little beast hold its head and sway pitifully from side to side.

The conglomeration of humanity that made up the population of the station was amazing. Native tribesmen, their faces hideously mutilated, strolled about, as is the way of natives, as though they had all time at their disposal. Huge African negroes, proudly dressed in incongruous bits of civilised clothing, loafed down by the quay, waiting to

unload the boats as they arrived. Derelict white men, who had once known the comfort of an English home, stared moodily into space, wondering how they could get enough money to buy themselves another drink. Years ago, so they would tell me, they had come to the Gaboon country on one of the cargo boats. Attracted by the lazy tropical life, they had stayed on shore when the ship sailed away again. Now they had degenerated into drunken down-and-outs and beachcombers, who searched aimlessly along the tideway for any small article cast up by the sea, much as a tramp searches the London streets for cigarette-ends. They only lived for the day when a boat arrived at the station, for then their hopes of a free drink ran high.

I often wondered why these men, obviously and volubly unsatisfied with their lot, made no attempt to return to the civilisation which they had known in their more prosperous days. But when I asked them the reason, their answer, if they bothered to reply, was invariably the same. They had become accustomed to the lazy, idle life, to the enervating heat, to the ministrations of the native women. They could not be bothered to make a change.

Life at the trading station was extremely monotonous, enlivened only when a freighter made its appearance. The men, black and white, lazed about all day, sleeping and drinking and sauntering down by the shore. The women did all the work. It was they who did all the fetching and carrying, ground the corn, and gathered fruits and

berries. It was they, even, who, when the bartering was being conducted, conveyed all the spoil to the receiver. I soon found that the African native treated his wife with as little respect as the Arab did, and that he was very offended if I dared to ask after her welfare. His attitude, in fact, was much the same as we in England would adopt if a guest violated our hospitality by asking if the blackbeetles in the house were flourishing!

Trading was, of course, the only serious occupation which went on at the station, and even that was conducted in a leisurely manner and with frequent stops for refreshment. The dealers were men of all races and nationalities, Dutchmen, Frenchmen, Russians, Dagos, Chinese, Japanese, Eurasians, Arabs. They spoke for the most part in a sort of simplified native dialect, in pidgin-English, or in a *patois* of Portuguese, Arabic and French. Much gesticulation and sign-language accompanied their conversation, and the natives never found it very difficult to understand them.

Not much money was used in the transactions. They were conducted chiefly by a system of barter, and the native invariably got the worst of the deal. He had little idea of the value of things and he would often exchange a priceless piece of elephant tusk for a trinket worth less than sixpence. The most trumpery objects, as long as they glittered sufficiently, were in his opinion invaluable. He would barter his very soul for a shining toy. In this respect he reminded me very much of the captive monkey who, once he gets hold of a glitter-

ing object, will play with it for hours, will clutch it to his breast and grunt and titter and grin.

So the white men did very well out of the child-like credulity of their native customers. In exchange for drinking utensils, for the native is too lazy to make any for himself, pieces of coloured silk, and little parasols, the traders obtained wind-dried skins, tribal ornaments, nose-rings and ear-pieces, porcupine quills, and exotic feathers. For a piece of mirror, one of the most prized possessions that a native can have, they received gold and ivory. For lengths of cheap printed material and cards of shining buttons, they took vast quantities of copra, spears, and reptile skins. In exchange for a shabby pair of boots, they became the owners of quaint carven images which they were able to sell at high prices to dealers in curios.

The traders, too, were very anxious to acquire live animals to sell to owners of circuses and zoos. The amount of money and goods that they paid for these prizes was ridiculously small. They would give the native hunter, who had perhaps dared death to make the capture, a bottle of whisky in exchange for a fine specimen ; or they would pay a penny a foot for a snake, £3 for a young Gorilla, and 30s. for a young chimpanzee. When one considers the enormous sums which circuses will pay for a healthy young ape, the profiteering of these traders seems almost incredible. I do not approve of capturing live animals, yet I often felt sorry for the natives who were thus made the dupes of civilisation.

Although I was often amazed at the blatant way in which the white men conducted their fraudulent bargainings, at their greed and systematic robbery, I never interfered with the trading. I went on my own way and kept my own counsel, hoping always for the time when I would be well enough to leave this wretched outpost of civilisation and return once more to the natural life of the forest.

I always got on very well with the inhabitants of the trading station, but during the whole of my nine months' stay with them I found myself unable to become really friendly with any of them. Their human speech and conversation irritated me; I could not understand their annoyance over what seemed to me to be petty trifles; I could not endure their almost incessant state of drunkenness. So I wandered round the place alone, preferring to find companionship among the various birds and animals that were put in little bamboo and wicker cages, waiting to be sold. In the forest I had become accustomed to sleeping during the heat of the day and travelling about in the cool of the evening or the early morning. Now, even though I was among a crude sort of civilisation again, I found that I was unable to break myself of the habit, and often at dead of night, when everyone else was asleep, I used to hobble down to the market and visit my animal friends.

How pleased they were to see me! The look of gratitude that came into their bewildered little eyes when they realised that they had found a friend amidst all the humiliation of captivity;

the soft, excited noises with which they greeted me ; the pathetic way in which they tugged and gnawed at the bars of their cages ; all these things made me sad and despondent. The little human faces of the monkeys conveyed to me so clearly their longing to escape from the cruel hands of their captors into the safe, cool depths of the nearby jungle. Sometimes I used to go to what I considered were the really deserving cases, open the doors of their cages, and help them to escape. But although they used to leap away, chattering excitedly, they were often caught again. For a monkey, when it has once been in contact with civilisation, seems to hang about the vicinity for a few days and, if found, is easily captured. If, however, it manages to escape man's vigilance for a little while, it will desert the habitation and go back to its natural environment.

One evening, about eight months after my capture, I was walking as usual down to the market to visit the caged animals. My ankle was by now completely healed, and I was feeling so well that I decided that the time had come for me to seek once more the Kings of the Forest. When I neared the quayside I saw that a freighter had just arrived. A crowd of natives were hanging about, hoping to pick up some bright toy from the white men as they disembarked, and a number of burly negroes were carrying bales of cloth and cases of goods down the gangway and into the village. As I watched the scene, a strangely animated one compared with the usual deadly monotony and idleness of life at

the station, one of the derelict whites of the place, an old Dutchman, came up to me with the curious shambling gait which all beachcombers seem to acquire.

"There's someone wants to see you," he mumbled, in a hoarse voice which gave me the impression that he was about to deliver some dreadful secret. "About Gorillas."

I pricked up my ears at that word, for any mention of my beloved friends immediately interested and excited me. I agreed to see the trader, and although I detested the smell and noise of the drinking-house I allowed my dirty companion to lead me to it, wondering as I went what any man could want with me, or with my friends the Gorilla.

I was soon to know. Almost before we had entered the rough tavern a big, burly Englishman came up to me, patted me boisterously on the back, dragged me to a table, and insisted on giving me a drink. Once these courtesies were over he soon came to the point. He had heard of my "wonderful exploits," as he called them, among the anthropoid apes; obviously I knew my way about the jungle; would I go out into the forest with him and help him to capture some Gorilla? "I'll make it worth your while, Mr. Du Berrie," he finished, swilling whisky down his throat and banging the glass on the table as though the bargain were already concluded. "I'll go fifty-fifty with you in any sales I make, and that should mean a tidy fortune for both of us."

For perhaps an instant I hesitated. Then I remembered the little captive monkeys down in the market-place, tugging at the cruel bars of their cages, and cringing away from the tormenting captors. I recalled a young Gorilla that had been brought into the station a few weeks ago, too terrified and homesick to eat. It was bruised and bleeding where a forked stick had been placed around its neck to prevent its escape, and it pined and moped until at last it died. Even I was unable to comfort or reassure the little creature: the harsh treatment which it had received at the hands of human beings had reduced it to an unalterable state of scared savagery. Above all, I remembered my affectionate Gorilla friend in the forest, killed by the greedy hand of just such a trader as the one sitting before me. I shook my head. Nothing, I told him, nothing would induce me to betray the creatures that loved and trusted me.

The trader did his best to make me change my mind. He tried persuasion, flattery, bribery, even contempt. When at last he realised that no inducement would alter my decision, he began to use threats. He suddenly switched a wicked-looking knife from his belt. "If you won't do what I want, I can make you," he muttered.

By this time I had had enough. I had learned to defend myself in the jungle against the rage of marauding leopards; I had fought monstrous snakes; I had even wrestled with the mighty Gorilla. Now this audacious man was daring to menace me because I would not assist him in his

greedy schemes. In the forest, speed is everything: while the laggard is making up his mind, the snake strikes, the leopard springs. So as quickly as lightning, before the trader was aware that I had moved, I darted forward my right hand and knocked his knife to the floor. Almost at the same moment we both rose up, almost automatically, knocking our chairs over as we did so, and each flung himself at the other's throat.

So we fought, it seemed for ages, backwards and forwards over the rude floor of the tavern. No one appeared to take any notice of us, the sight was a common enough one in all conscience, and we grappled on, panting and grunting and with the sweat streaming off our faces. The trader was a strong, hefty man with a grip like iron, but his sight and sense of direction were obviously somewhat impaired by the amount of liquor that he had drunk. I, on the other hand, although I was not sure at first how my ankle would stand the additional strain, had benefited greatly by my life in the jungle. Moreover, I was fighting for my friends, the Gorilla, and I could not afford to lose.

For a time it seemed as though the battle might go on indefinitely, and then suddenly a sort of animal intuition told me that my opponent was weakening. With a supreme effort I managed to encircle his throat with my hands, hands that had grown strong and sinewy from the constant climbing of trees, and I bent his head farther and farther back. He gurgled horribly, his eyes seemed to be starting out of their sockets, and then all at

once he screamed out that he had had enough, that I was killing him, that I had won.

When the cargo boat sailed away in a week's time, bearing its load of ivory and gold and skins, the trader sailed with it. But he had captured no Gorilla.

CHAPTER X

A PRISONER AMONG THE BLACKS

MY fight with the British trader did nothing to improve my opinion of the human race, which was not high at the best of times. It was true that I had managed to prevent him from taking away any of my Gorilla friends into ignominious captivity, and that he had sailed home with his cruel greed unsatisfied. But I felt that I had not seen the last of him or of his kind, that other traders would come and endeavour to make me betray my friends. I determined that before that could happen I would leave the station and seek once again the friendly depths of the forest.

So after resting for a few days to recover from the effects of my ordeal with the stranger, which were greater than I had at first imagined and left me stiff and sore, I approached the captain of a trading vessel lying at anchor in the little harbour. To my great joy I found that the boat was nosing round the coast, calling at all the little ports to deliver goods and take others on board. After a certain amount of arguing, the captain agreed to set me down at the mouth of the Gaboon River, the scene of the beginning of my former adventure, and I booked my passage.

The night before the freighter was due to sail I went down to the market place to say good-bye to my little captive friends. As usual there were few people about, and as I got nearer I could hear the monkeys chattering excitedly as they scented me. They seemed to realise that something was wrong, that this was the last time that they would see the one human being who had shown them any kindness, and they wrenched at their cages in a longing to escape. One little chimpanzee especially was downhearted at my imminent departure. He moaned and whimpered, and looked so pathetic that I suddenly made up my mind I would take him with me. Stealthily I slipped the catch of his prison, and like a flash he leaped into my arms, chattering softly and nuzzling up to me. Without a moment's hesitation he elected to become my travelling companion.

Two weeks passed before we reached the Gaboon. At every primitive station and coastal village we dropped anchor, and stayed, often two or three nights, while the natives brought out their treasures for our inspection. Although I was in an agony of impatience to be on my way, the traders were in no hurry. They did not seem to mind whether their black customers took one day or four, to decide on their purchases. As long as they could spend the evenings swilling "fire-water" in the drinking-house, they were quite content. So I had to master my impatience, and spent most of the time playing with my little companion.

At last one evening as we drifted slowly along we came to a part of the coast which looked familiar to me. The shore suddenly seemed to break away inland, and the giant trees receded and gave way to mangrove swamps and a rude native habitation. I recognised it immediately as the mouth of the Gaboon River, not far away from the place where I had begun my jungle life all those months ago. Once again my hopes rose high, and I longed to go ashore there and then and renew the search for my lost Gorilla friends.

That night I was scarcely able to sleep for excitement. I realised then, as I waited impatiently for the morning, how much I had missed my carefree forest existence, and how the life of semi-civilisation had irked and trammelled me. There was no regret or fear in my mind as I prepared to leave the boat. All that worried me was how long it would be before I saw my Gorilla companions again.

Almost before dawn had broken, therefore, I persuaded the sailors to put me and my chimpanzee ashore. This time, instead of journeying many miles on foot in order to reach the depths of the primeval forest, I decided to penetrate inland by means of the Gaboon River. Such a method, I felt, would be quicker and easier and would ensure the finding of the Gorilla, because I had learnt from my previous experience that the anthropoids invariably frequented places not far from streams and rivers, in order that when the need arose they would have an adequate supply of water.

I chartered a canoe from one of the natives, in

exchange for some bales of bright cotton cloth which the captain of the freighter had given me. It was a primitive affair, constructed "dug-out" fashion from the hollowed trunk of a tree. Although rather clumsy to handle and lying very low in the water, it was almost impossible to overturn, a very great asset considering the crocodile-infested streams. Placing my chimpanzee in the bottom and eagerly wielding the paddle, I made my way up-stream towards the home of the Gorilla.

It was a remarkable voyage. As we penetrated farther and farther into the sunless depths, the river narrowed, and the branches of overhanging trees intertwined so thickly that often I could catch no glimpse of the sky. Sometimes as we floated past, shy creatures, disturbed in their drinking, would flash away back into the undergrowth. Sometimes great grey crocodiles, their heads resting sleepily on the surface of the water, would slowly open their jaws at the strange apparition as it drifted by. My chimpanzee was a gay and loving companion, and often, by his shrill screams of fright, he would warn me of some danger of which I was not aware. Many a time I steered the canoe into the bank and was about to alight when he set up his chattering cry; and as he did so a long, still log in the mud would raise itself slowly, and I would realise that I had been saved yet again from the cruel clutch of those sharp, reptilian teeth, and from almost certain death. For once a crocodile gets a grip on his victim, he will rarely let go.

We spent many happy hours together, romping on the banks of the river, wrestling lovingly, and searching for sweet shoots and berries to eat. He was only a little chap, scarcely half-grown, and at night time, when I used to rest in the bottom of the boat, he would come close to me, his baby arms would encircle my neck, and he would sleep curled up beside me as peacefully as a child. But I was not destined to enjoy his companionship for long. One morning, directly I beached my little craft, he set off through the forest alone, a procedure which he had only adopted once or twice before. It was some hours before he returned, and when he did at length appear through the trees and run towards me, he was in a terribly agitated state, shivering all over and screaming diabolically. He was, I knew, in great pain. That night I camped on the shore, and for the next few days I nursed him carefully, bringing him the choicest roots and plantains that I could find and plaiting a blanket of long grass to keep him warm. But all my ministrations were of no avail, and after four days of pain and misery, he died of dysentery.

Now I was indeed alone. I had become so accustomed to his friendly chatterings, to his little clinging body, that without him I grew sad and despondent. I felt that it was imperative for me to find some companions other than my miserable thoughts, and I determined that I would leave the river and push through the forest until I met with some friendly apes.

Accordingly I beached my canoe, leaving it

moored to the bank, a find for any black man who might come across it. I discarded my upper garments, knowing from my previous experience how they hampered movement, and plunged into the undergrowth. My nine months' sojourn in the semi-civilisation of the trading station had done little to dull the memory of my habits in the forest, and I soon found that I was able to press through the tangled vegetation at a good pace and without much discomfort. I swung along eagerly, often forsaking the long grass and clinging briars for a freer passage among the branches of the trees, and always keeping my eyes and ears open for any sign of the Gorilla. From time to time I threw back my head and uttered the cry which I had used in calling the apes to council. The sound echoed through the stillness of the forest until it seemed to me that any Gorilla within fifty miles must surely hear the invitation and respond to it. But no answering cry met my ears. I was still alone.

So I journeyed for days, chiefly in the tree tops, and hoping always to catch a glimpse of a black hairy body, to hear a mighty roar of welcome. But they never came, and even though I was happy to be once more free from the pinched life of civilisation, to be able to roam where I liked and how I liked, my feeling of misery and loneliness increased. If only I could meet the Gorilla ! My despondency was so great that I began to take unnecessary risks and chances with Nature. In my overwhelming desire to find the apes I grew less wary and alert

than I should have been. This was to prove my undoing.

One day as I pressed through the forest I felt an overwhelming desire to quench my thirst. I was continually wanting to drink in the jungle, mainly because I lost so much moisture in perspiration, and I had not yet inured myself to going for days without any refreshment. None of the berries which I gathered seemed to relieve my parched tongue, even the fleshy leaves of the lianas were bitter and sapless. After a time I climbed a tall tree, and as I looked out over the green canopy of foliage I spied in the distance a glint of water. It was a stream ! I took careful note of the direction, dropped from the tree, and set off.

In spite of my agony of thirst I did not forget all precautions. I approached the drinking-hole carefully, not desiring to fall the prey of a lurking beast. But all seemed quiet. I could sense no danger, not a leaf seemed to be stirring, and I crept softly down to the edge of the stream. I knelt down, leaned over the bank, and cupped my hands to dip in the muddy water. I had barely moistened my fingers when suddenly in the still air there came a whizzing sound, and an arrow flew down close to my ear and buried itself in the soft ooze of the bank.

Like a flash I stood up, my thirst still unquenched. The water dripped from my fingers and fell with little plops on to the ground. I listened, I sniffed the air, I watched the trees and bushes for any sign of movement. But nothing

happened. There was nothing and no one to tell me where the arrow had come from, or from whose bow it had been catapulted at my defenceless head. The silence was uncanny. Not a twig cracked, not a grass rustled, as I stood up and looked around. I felt that I was at the mercy of something invisible, that I had only to make one movement to be struck down by a second arrow. This time, I knew, it would not miss.

I gazed around, trying to decide on my course of action, and as I did so I saw about fifty yards away a little clearing flanked by a thick plantation of trees that might offer some sort of protection in case of an attack. I began to canter towards it, running from side to side in an attempt to avoid any further arrows. And suddenly, to my horror, all the trees and waving grasses came to life. Before I was half-way to the clearing I was surrounded by a band of marauding natives, armed with long bows and arrows and wicked-looking spears.

Dirty and scantily clad, the blacks stood in clustering groups around me, gesticulating and palavering among themselves. They continually repeated the word "Ingina," which I found later meant "Gorilla," but I could understand nothing of these few syllables which managed to reach me out of all the babel. Actually they were asking me if I wanted to buy any Gorilla, for apparently many white men had followed the Gaboon River as far as this in their search for the great beasts, which fetched a great price in the markets at home

and in America. But at the time I was completely mystified, until one tall warrior came up to me and in a mixture of sign-language and pidgin-English conveyed his intention to me. I tried to explain in dumb-show that I was not interested in his offer, that I had no money or goods and had no wish to trade for the Kings of the Forest. After a while he grasped my meaning, scowled horribly, and went back with my message to the headman.

When the blacks found that I neither wanted to buy Gorilla nor go hunting, that I was alone and unarmed, they became very hostile. They closed in threateningly, and before I was aware of it I found myself pinned to the ground by six or eight stalwart warriors. On finding myself a prisoner I fought wildly for my freedom. I struggled, I screamed, I used my teeth, I kicked like one possessed. But all was in vain, and in a few minutes I found myself bound tightly with crude leather thongs. The natives have a very refined way of binding their prisoners, so refined in its studied torture that it would do credit to the best efforts of a Chinese executioner.

Then they took me, helpless as I was, and tied me to a tall tree in the clearing. My arms encircled the trunk behind me, my feet were spread wide apart, and there I remained for the whole of that afternoon, evening and night. No one can possibly imagine the torture of those endless hours. The tree to which I was bound was at the side of an open space in the forest, and therefore I was exposed to the scorching rays of the sun. My thirst

was terrific : it had been unquenched before, now it descended upon me with redoubled force. My limbs grew stiff and cramped, and as I struggled to release myself from the cruel bondage the leather thongs cut into my wrists and ankles until they bled furiously. Even breathing was difficult, for a piece of dirty rag gagged my mouth, and when morning came my tongue was swollen to twice its normal size and turning blue.

All that night the torture continued. Every hour my hunger and thirst became more and more unbearable. Every minute I expected some beast to leap out of the undergrowth and begin to tear my flesh. But although I could see many of them stealing down to the water-hole and quenching themselves with the precious liquid which was denied to me, none of them attempted to molest me. One young animal, possibly a leopard, but I could not see the ground immediately in front of me and therefore could not say for certain, came up and sniffed the bloodstained thongs around my ankles. But luckily a sudden noise nearby frightened him, and he slipped away without trying his teeth in my leg.

When morning came I roused myself from the semi-conscious state into which I had gradually fallen. I had now been almost twenty-four hours in this terrible plight, and I began to wonder if the blacks, disgusted at my lack of money, had decided to leave me to die. Soon after noon, however, when the sun again began its indescribable torture, the natives returned, on their stealthy velvet

tread. They came up to me, gabbling among themselves and paying no more attention to me than if I had been a decoy placed there to entrap unwary animals. They conferred a little together, and then two of them bent down and began to loosen the bonds from my legs and ankles. Was I to be allowed to go free? But even as I asked myself the question I realised that my arms were still bound, and that, as far as I could see, they were going to remain so.

I stumbled about for a little while, trying to get the feeling back into my numbed legs. One of the natives came forward with a calabash full of water and held it up to my mouth. At the sight of the twinkling liquid I nearly went mad, but I remembered just in time that it was absolutely suicidal to drink a lot of water after going without for so long. Keeping myself well in control, I bent my head and just moistened my lips and parched mouth with the liquid. How delicious it was! The same native then brought me a few berries, which I ate gratefully. My frugal meal over, all the warriors arose, my hands were bound even more securely behind my back, and I found myself being marched at a steady pace through the forest, off into captivity.

CHAPTER XI

TORTURED IN THE NATIVE VILLAGE

FOR four days and nights I was marched through the dark forest by the troop of black warriors, and I was able to study them closely. Since those early days of adventure and exploration I have been in contact with many inhabitants of the African continent, and I am firmly convinced that the natives of the Congo and the Gaboon country are slightly, but very definitely, different from the members of any other tribe.

My captors were not particularly muscular, nor were they splendid specimens of humanity, as the Zulus are, being much lower both in stature and intelligence. I soon came to the conclusion, indeed, that their powers of thinking and reasoning were not above those of a European child of fourteen years. Their features were diabolical in the extreme ; they had a sort of fixed expression of hate on their faces which I found really nauseating until I became used to it. It was as though by their dreadful appearance alone they hoped to frighten their enemies into submission. Their lips were big and fleshy, hanging down horribly towards their chins ; their noses broad and flat to the face, with

wide, open nostrils ; their foreheads very wrinkled. Added to this natural ugliness of countenance were cuts and gashes liberally made on their faces and brows, the significance of which I was to learn later. Many of them had these gashes deep on their chests and backs, and nearly all had three cuts on the face between the temple and the eye, just above the cheek-bone.

Ornaments, too, exaggerated their appalling ugliness. Some wore ear-rings of brass or copper, so heavy that the lobe was weighed down almost to their shoulders. Some had pieces of iron pierced through their lower lip so that the decaying teeth were exposed. Others had porcupine quills stuck through their nostrils. It seemed to me that it was by the monstrosities of some awful nightmare that I was being led like a slave to my unknown destination.

All this time, as we journeyed through the forest, my hands were bound firmly behind my back. This made walking a difficulty, almost a torture, for I was unable to use my arms to brush aside the clambering briars and creepers that obstructed the path. Moreover, if I attempted to make a detour to avoid a particularly unpleasant part of the track, a spear was immediately prodded into the small of my back and I was forced to go on. So I pushed forward, scratched and bleeding, wondering how long this trek through the forest was going to last. At night the warriors would make little fires, by means of friction, to keep away the prowling beasts, and then lie down inside this

smouldering circle. I, strangely enough, was also drawn within the safety of the fires, but I found it very difficult to get any sleep, because I was able to lie only on my face.

At length, just before noon on the fourth day, the sound of shouts and shrill screams suddenly broke out a little ahead of us. We had not progressed more than a hundred yards when the undergrowth grew thin and the long grass seemed to have been cut away. All at once we came out into a clearing, which the presence of a few crude huts presumably dignified into the name of a village. The noise of shouting that we had heard had come from the womenfolk, who came running out of their houses to meet the troop of warriors and escort them home. Their presence and the obvious delight which they evinced at the return of their men, showed me that this was the home of my captors. Had we been an unexpected and hostile band, bent on a raid, the men of the village would have come to meet us with spears and ferocious war-cries, and the women would have been left shut up in the huts with their children.

The village, as far as I could see, was a sort of *boma*, or compound, made up of about fifty crude huts constructed of *lalang* grass, straw and palm leaves. The huts were incredibly dirty and dusty and extremely small: it was surprising how many natives managed to live in one of them. At one end of the village there seemed to be a larger building, more sturdily constructed and looking far more imposing than the other houses. This,



CROCODILE



AN OLD BLIND CHIEF DESERTED BY HIS TRIBE

I was to learn later, was the Council Chamber, where the Chief and the Witch Doctor palavered together on affairs of the tribe and decided what raids were to be made on neighbouring villages.

As we walked through the compound I was the object of much curiosity on the part of the villagers. They talked excitedly together, pointing at the strange object and gesticulating wildly. Some of the boldest of them approached cautiously and touched me, but on the whole they were content to look at me from a safe distance. I, in turn, looked curiously at them. The men, apart from the marauding troop, lazed beneath the shadow of their huts, or sauntered about sleepily. It was the women who were doing all the work. Some of them were grinding corn in primitive mortars, their shaven heads full in the broiling sun. Others were making mealie cakes and baking them in a natural field oven, which they made by digging a hole in the ground, filling it with dried twigs, and making a fire by friction. As I came to know their habits more closely I found that it often took a native woman hours to get the fire going properly. But time does not count for much in Africa, and they had all day in which to do it. When smoke eventually began to filter through the sticks, the fire-maker blew and blew until a real blaze appeared, or occasionally she would use a primitive bellows made out of the whole skin of a dead animal and worked with the feet. The cakes were then put in the smoking embers and covered up until they were cooked.

Besides the mealie cakes, the natives also ate indian corn in its green stage, chewing it for hours in their mouths and spitting out the pith. Roots, too, formed a great part of their diet, and rice when they could get it. Meat was a great luxury, for it was not always available and the men were usually too lazy to go out and spear animals. But when they did come by it they gorged themselves until they could eat no more, and I know for a fact that the Chief of the tribe, and also the Witch Doctor, fed, if they could get it, on blood flowing from the living animal.

My captors took me down the centre of the village, past the curious stare of the hardworking women, to a small hut not far from the Council Chamber. There was a long pole in the centre of it, supporting the rough, palm-leaf roof, and to this I was lashed. When they saw that I was securely fastened, beyond all possibility of escape, the warriors left me, with nothing to eat or drink, and no companions other than my gloomy thoughts. I looked about me as well as I could. The interior of the hut was almost unbelievably dank and smelly; from the state of the floor it might have been the den of some wild animals. For these African natives, as I was already beginning to realise, are extremely dirty in their habits and have no notion of the simplest rules of hygiene. The stench of the place was almost unbearable. It seemed to rise up in great waves from the steaming ground and envelop me until I was well nigh asphyxiated.

As afternoon drew on and the sun no longer penetrated the grass thatching, the hut grew darker and darker. Outside I could hear the steady beat of tom-toms, the insistent throbbing of drums, and the shuffle of many naked feet. I guessed that a dance was being held in honour of the return of the warriors, or possibly to signalize my capture. But I could see nothing of it, and no one came to disturb my solitude. At length, in spite of my hunger and thirst and the uncomfortable position in which I was bound, I managed to sleep.

For three days I remained in this filthy prison, lashed to the central peg, and during that time I had to suffer almost unendurable tortures and insults. In the first place, I was given scarcely enough food to keep me alive: about twice a day a native would enter the hut and cram a few berries into my mouth; but apart from this I had no means of allaying my hunger or moistening my parched tongue. Through the chinks in the grass walls I could see men sauntering about, chewing roots and sugar-cane, or quaffing palm wine from calabashes. But I was doomed to lie in the stinking darkness of the hut, with no means of quenching my ever-increasing thirst.

I had to submit each day to the most embarrassing attentions on the part of the native women. They would come peering through the grass walls, giggling and nudging each other like young school-girls. Then, growing bolder, they would venture inside and stand round the pole staring at me. At length one, braver than the rest, would put

out a venturesome hand and touch my skin, and in a minute they were all clustered round me trying, in their innocence, to rub the whiteness off me. They thought, presumably, that beneath my pale skin I was as black as themselves. They prodded me and poked me. They pulled my hair and beard. And, worst of all, they had an unpleasant habit of licking me all over, in order to taste the salt that was oozing from my body in perspiration. For a white man, unlike a black, perspires very freely in Equatorial Africa. Sometimes, if one of their fingers came too close to my mouth, I would snap my teeth suddenly, and they would all rush away shrieking and giggling and stand a little distance off, looking at me. When they were reassured that I was securely bound and unable to chase them they returned to their uncomfortable pastime.

The Gaboon natives went about naked, save for the married women, who tied a sort of tail of plaited grass to their bodies as a token that they had attained that enviable state. The marriage ceremonies, as I was to discover later, were long-drawn-out affairs, during which the man bartered for the hand of his prospective bride with her father. Often the father was extremely poor and gladly yielded up his daughter for a few old buttons, a handful of rice or mealie, or a piece of gaudily-coloured cloth. A daughter of the Chief or the Witch Doctor, on the other hand, could not be bought so cheaply, and the man who aspired to her hand had to bring some fine cattle to pay for it.

Many of the young women, in spite of their black skins, big lips and flat noses, were quite handsome. They were tall and carried their shaven heads high. But soon, after bearing child after child, and spending all their time cooking and fetching and carrying for their husbands, they grew old and fat and ugly. It was almost impossible to believe that the shapeless old hags bending over their ovens, usually with a child of two years hanging on to their breast and another of a few months tied to their shoulders behind, could ever have been described as remotely good-looking.

But the insults of the women, as they prodded me and licked the salt from my skin, seemed only playful compared with the tortures which I had to endure at the hands of the men. They used to come into the hut for no reason except to torment me. With their spears, the heads dipped in some fluid that set up a terrible irritation, they would prick my skin until the blood ran down on to the filthy ground and coloured it crimson. Others brought flails, made out of thin strips of skin and coarse grasses, and lashed my defenceless body with them. Had I been able to retaliate I might have borne these painful indignities more easily. But bound as I was I could only lie on the floor and endure them as best I might.

The natives themselves seemed to have no perception of pain. They bore the tortures which they inflicted upon each other, the gashes and the deep cuts, with perfect equanimity. Such mutilations, they felt, were all made in a good cause,

ensuring that the warrior would be successful in battle and able to endure much pain. When they found, therefore, that I was not used to such brutal treatment and shrank from their cruel spears and whips, they took a fiendish delight in redoubling their efforts, until I almost began to wish that one of the spears would find a vital spot and end all my misery and degradation. But of course such a merciful eventuality never happened. The warriors, as I realised afterwards, had strict orders from the Chief concerning their captive. I was to be reserved for something far more important than a chance death at the hands of a sadistic native.

On the third day, when I was in a state of complete exhaustion, one of the warriors entered the hut. I looked up at him listlessly, not caring much whether he was going to release me or take me to my death. I had suffered so much at the hands of the natives during those three days of imprisonment that I really did not care much whether I lived or died. Even the wild animals had acted towards me with more respect and kindness. In fact I would never have believed that a human being could suffer so much and survive.

The warrior came towards me and, bending down, cut loose the leather thongs which bound me to the pole. I staggered helplessly for some time until use returned to my numbed limbs. Outside we were met by three other warriors, who started forward, caught hold of my arms, two on each side, and marched me off towards the

large Council hut which I had noticed earlier. Although I did not know it at the time, a Council was about to be held to decide my fate.

When we arrived at the tribunal hut, where the law of the natives was administered according to the rites of the tribe, I was left outside with two of the warriors while the other two went inside, presumably to give notice of my arrival. After a time the whole side of the hut was removed, for it was fashioned somewhat after the manner of sheep hurdles in this country, and I beheld the most savage assembly that has ever met the eyes of a white man.

CHAPTER XII

A SAVAGE TRIBUNAL

I WAS appalled at the grotesqueness and ugliness of the warriors who were met together to decide my fate. They sat there silently, tall spears in their hands, some with plaited shields of wicker-work over their arms, and their gashed faces stared at me with expressions of the most diabolical malevolence. I felt that it was useless to hope for mercy from such a savage and bloodthirsty assembly. One word from the Chief and they would all fall upon me like so many hungry jackals and tear me to pieces.

The Chief himself sat enthroned in the centre of the throng, on the stump of a dead tree. In striking contrast to the naked, glistening bodies of his followers, he was draped in a leopard skin and ornamented with a cloak of feathers which, although dirty and draggled, gave him a certain air of magnificence. He was an old man, very emaciated and wrinkled. At one time he must have been a colossus in stature, but disease had eaten away the healthy flesh and now he was very near to death. I had already noticed that nearly every member of the tribe was suffering from some

disease or sickness, and almost every warrior had his chest covered with running sores.

It was the duty of the Chief to preside at all disputes and palavers and to settle all discussions that arose about marriages, murders and thefts. If any man considered that he had been wronged, that his spear had been stolen or his wife bewitched, he had the right to report to the Chief and demand a trial. A Council would then be held, attended by all the villagers, and justice would be meted out, often with the Witch Doctor playing a principal part and "smelling out" the criminal. In some large tribes, with many members living in different villages, there would be a headman of each village and a Chief over all. But the community to which I had been brought seemed to be a whole tribe in itself and had no connection, as far as I could see, with any other natives of the forest. The Chief ruled it, and now he was sitting with his followers round him, waiting to pass judgment on me.

Before him, standing on one leg like a stork, was the Witch Doctor.

In the more remote parts of Africa the medicine-man is still master of the tribe; even the Chief, the nominal head, goes in fear of him, and he is able to bend all the people to his will. By his skilful use of the popular fetish-worship he has complete ascendancy over the native mind and he uses his power to the worst of ends. But although he is indeed an uncanny person, with extraordinary influence over his dupes, it does not take a par-

ticularly intelligent man to see through him, because what he attributes to supernatural power, the normal human being will realise is trickery. But the average native, and most natives seem to come into this category, has an extremely small mind and is easily gulled.

One of the Witch Doctor's chief occupations is the making of *ju-jus* or talismans. He professes to be able to induce a spirit, and the natives believe that the air is full of spirits, to enter into some particular object and, by residing there, to help the owner to achieve some specific desire. The talismans vary considerably: snail shells, nut shells, antelope horns, beads or hollow stones, all make admirable spirit homes, because they have cavities that can be filled with alluring substances to attract the spirit and persuade it to enter. When he is preparing a fetish the Witch Doctor chooses these enticing substances according to the purpose for which the talisman is required. Should the purchaser desire to be given courage in battle, portions of the heart of a leopard are placed in the charm; should he ask for cunning, a piece of snakeskin is hidden in the whorl of the shell or the hole of the bead; if he desires to search out some hidden enemy, human eyeballs are mashed up and used to lure an appropriate spirit. Together with this specific substance the medicine-man places in the talisman other magic materials: the shredded leaves of particular plants, pieces of bone and sinew from the dead bodies of animals or men, drops of gum and resin, and, most impor-

tant of all, portions of human eyes, brains and hearts. Then, having conjured a spirit to enter the abode by means of spells and incantations and the beating of drums, he sells the fetish to the purchaser for a considerable sum.

It often happens, of course, that the talisman does not do what is required of it. Having asked for a charm to protect himself against spears in battle, the owner might quite well return from a fight seriously wounded. Another man, with a fetish to make his corn grow, might find that the crop was the worst that he had ever had. But the Witch Doctor always has an answer for the disgruntled owner of the charm.

"There is another man with a more powerful spirit in his *ju-ju*, trying to work you evil," he will say. "But in return for a bale of cloth and a good goat I will make an even greater spirit enter your *ju-ju*, and then your corn will grow." The deluded native never for one moment doubts the words of the medicine-man. He pays over the required price, and the Doctor is richer by a bale of cloth or a goat.

I also found that the natives invariably asked for a *ju-ju* to give them "power over their enemies." For such a talisman the Witch Doctor required to be given some portion of the particular enemy in question, to put in the charm, and the purchaser would hand over to him fragments of the person's hair, parings from his finger-nails, or even, if it was obtainable, a drop of his blood. The natives were so terrified lest any of their fellows should

gain ascendancy and influence over them that when they cut their nails or hair, they always burned or buried the clippings; and if a drop of their blood happened to fall upon the ground they would stamp furiously into the earth until it had disappeared.

The whole life of these natives was governed, as far as I could see, by this fetishism. Charms were fashioned by the Witch Doctor for every conceivable phase of existence. Every desire, every passion, every journey undertaken or task begun had a fetish made to ensure its successful completion. And the Witch Doctor waxed fat on the proceeds of his innumerable sales.

Apparently any member of the tribe can become a medicine-man, provided that he has the necessary qualification: an ability to "see spirits." This supernatural power is usually discovered when the potential Witch Doctor is a boy, passing through one of the various secret societies into which the tribe is divided. His parents, acknowledging that he is a greater one than themselves, apprentice him to the Witch Doctor for a large fee and he learns his studies. He is taught which plants and herbs are acceptable offerings with which to entice spirits to enter *ju-jus*. He discovers how to understand and manage the gods. He is initiated into the mysteries of ceremony and ritual. When his master dies, usually, in the opinion of the natives, from the effects of being "eaten" by his ungrateful familiar spirit, the apprentice steps into his shoes and assumes the

priestly office, and the whole business of humbug and trickery begins again.

Such a Witch Doctor was this man who stood stork-like before the Chief, looking more like some horrible little one-legged idol than a human being. His appearance was frightful in the extreme. He was of medium height and very emaciated, so that he appeared to be almost a living skeleton. His ribs seemed to stand away from his flesh, and his chest was a mass of little running ulcers. To add to the ugliness of Nature's work, he had painted his body all over in a bright red colour, the colour of blood, to attract the spirits.

The countless ornaments and decorations which this monster wore were presumably of religious significance, but as far as I could see their one purpose seemed to be to make him even more hideous. Behind his ears were tied two crocodile bladders, so that they flapped at every movement of his head, and through the lobes were stuck eighteen pieces of ivory. Inflated fish-bladders were fastened to different parts of his body, giving him an inhuman aspect and making him look bloated and deformed. Through his flattened nose four porcupine quills were threaded, and he had many strings of animal teeth and claws hanging round his neck. Human skulls dangled from cords tied to his waist, and in each wizened hand he brandished a thigh bone. His under-lip was lengthened and terribly split by the three brass rings which pierced it, and his whole face was unrecognisable as human, so much was it painted

and mutilated. Such a creature, whose warped mind, I was soon to discover, was only equalled by his hideous body, was the most influential person in the tribe, before whom all the natives bowed themselves in awe.

He was apparently advising the Chief on the fate to be meted out to me, for as soon as I appeared before the assembly, he came hopping towards me, screaming rather like an hysterical woman, and prodded me with one of the bones in his hand. What was in his stunted little mind I do not know. But I do know what was in mine. I felt that I could willingly and without excuse have killed so loathsome a creature. After several war-whoops and gyrations he seemed to come to a decision. He returned to the Chief and began an earnest discussion with him, in which the other warriors joined. I could understand no word of the palaver, but it was easy to see that there were two schools of thought. The more bloodthirsty of them wanted to kill me, after even more brutal tortures, which they outlined in dumb show so convincingly that I was quite unable to mistake their meaning. Slow drowning, with the water creeping up inch by inch, roasting alive, even burial underground, seemed to have an equal share in their plans for my demise. The others, and the Witch Doctor seemed to be among them, thought that there might be some use for me, and suggested that it would be better if I were spared for a time.

The discussion swayed backwards and forwards for hours, as it appeared to me, standing dazed and

weak between my savage escort. I began to think eventually that the more kindly disposed were about to be influenced by the lurid gesticulations of their murderous companions, but at last the Witch Doctor made up his mind to settle the matter once and for all. From the scowls with which he favoured the assembly I gathered that he was not pleased with the lengthy palaver, and had decided that it was time for him to exert his wonted authority.

Accordingly he produced three knuckle-bones and began to toss them up into the air and catch them again, uttering weird chants as he did so. Having continued this performance for some little time, he let out a wild shriek and let the bones fall to the ground. In this crude way, without trial or excuse, my fate was to be decided. When the bones fell to the earth the Witch Doctor sidled up to them where they lay, to find out which sides lay uppermost. Each bone had different signs carved upon its four sides, and the medicine-man made his decisions in accordance with which signs were showing.

The verdict of the bones was obviously a popular one. The Witch Doctor, having scrutinized them carefully, announced the decision, which was greeted with much nodding of heads and clapping of hands. The assembled natives began to shift their positions, talk and stretch, as though they were in a theatre waiting for the curtain to go up. I grew somewhat apprehensive, wondering what part I was to play in the coming entertainment. I was soon to know.

wondered if this was indeed the prelude to death.

In a few minutes, however, the initial effect had worn off. My brain cleared ; my eyes focused again ; my limbs felt strong and free from pain. I was so well and buoyant that I was almost inclined to go up to the Witch Doctor and snap my fingers in his face. But discretion triumphed, and I stood silently before the assembly of natives, waiting to see what they intended to do with me now that their poison-test had failed.

They, meanwhile, were standing before the Council Chamber watching intently the effect of the potion. When they saw that, far from killing me, it had infused me with more life than I had had before, they became almost friendly. They ceased from their brutal proddings and pokings and escorted me in triumph back to the hut. I realised from their changed attitude, caused by my ability to withstand the Witch Doctor's medicine, that I was not to be killed. Had I known what other things they had in store for me, I might perhaps have wished for death.

CHAPTER XIII

“ THE PLACE OF THE GODS ”

MY ordeal over and myself vindicated, temporarily at any rate, in the eyes of the superstitious natives, I was escorted back to the hut in which I had spent so many hours of torture. Now at last I was treated with a little more tolerance. A leopard skin was thrown on the floor to make my dwelling a little more habitable, and I was given a lamp. This primitive light was made by a flax taper, which was passed through a bird from the rectum to the beak, hung up and then lighted. With the skin as a blanket, and the light to comfort me, I felt happier than I had done for many days. Best of all, I was left unbound, and to all intents and purposes there was nothing to prevent me from leaving the village. But in spite of my new-found freedom and the feeling, almost of reluctant respect, with which the natives now regarded me, I felt myself in a prison of watchful eyes, and I knew that at the slightest attempt to escape I should be hauled back into captivity.

For a few days I was left to wander around the village at will, always with this invisible guard at my heels, and during that time I learned a great deal more about the habits of the Gaboon natives.

They were, as I have said, an incredibly lazy lot of fellows : their day was one long round of idleness. They rose late in the morning, when the sun was already almost too hot for me to bear, although they seemed quite indifferent to its strength, and crawled sleepily out of their huts to begin the endless gorge of food. Their dutiful wives brought yams, plantains and mealie cakes to place before their greedy lords, who ate their breakfast in the open, sprawled about the compound. The whole day was one long repetition of this first meal. While the women cooked, fetched water from a nearby stream in gourds, plucked fruits and leaves, or plaited reed mats for the hut floors, the men lay about jabbering together, sleeping, or teasing any unfortunate children who happened to cross their path.

It was, as far as I could see, a dull life, far duller than my life among the Gorilla, for now there seemed to be nothing at all to relieve the monotony. Even danger from prowling and ravenous beasts was lacking, for the little fires which the natives lit every night before their huts successfully discouraged any marauders. The only excitement was a war waged against a neighbouring tribe, or an occasional foray into the forest in search of animal flesh ; for having once tasted this food the blacks crave it for the rest of their lives. But these expeditions were very short-lived and often unsuccessful, because as soon as noon drew on, and the hunters were assured that their prey had sought the cool and secret depths of the forest for the mid-day

siesta, they abandoned the chase and returned to the village.

These Gaboon blacks, as I have said before, were singularly lacking in intelligence. They seemed to have no idea of inventing any mechanical contrivances to improve their lot. They made no tools to help with their primitive harvesting; they never thought of fashioning the clay from the river banks into pots and dishes; and, naturally, their dull brains never enabled them to build roads through the forest more permanent than the jungle tracks, or to invent a written language for themselves. Progress meant nothing at all to them, and they lived their monotonous lives in the same way as, presumably, their forefathers had done for hundreds of years before them.

I little knew then, as I chafed at this uneventful existence, that I was about to change it for one infinitely more horrible.

One morning I was awakened by four or five warriors who pushed their way rudely into my hut and showed me by signs that I was to get up. I rose and followed them, wondering what new ordeal was in store for me and if I should be able to overcome it as well as I had done before. Outside, in front of the Council hut, a palaver seemed to be in progress. The Chief was gesticulating wildly and the Witch Doctor, looking more shrunk and wizened than ever, was gabbling some advice to him in the low, guttural tones which distinguish the speech of the Gaboon

native. Around this grotesque pair most of the blacks of the village were assembled, listening intently, so it seemed, to the instructions of their medicine-man. When I appeared with my escort the Witch Doctor ceased and he and the Chief came towards me, the former again with that strange look of curiosity on his face. He did not speak, but the Chief greeted me almost courteously and conveyed to me by gesture that the tribe, and I, were about to set out for a trek into the forest. He repeatedly held up one finger in front of me, and then pointed earnestly up at the sun, which seemed to be his way of telling me that the projected journey was to take one day.

It was a band of about a hundred warriors and their wives who set off through the forest with me a few hours later. The Chief and the Witch Doctor were among the number, but they stayed a little apart from the rest of the company, with a few chosen blacks to attend on them. Behind the medicine-man strode a troop of natives, in single file, bearing in their hands many gourds and calabashes and carrying others slung on sticks over their shoulders. I was completely mystified as to our destination, the more so as besides these water-carriers, most of the women were carrying food, lumps of meat and bundles of roots and berries.

The strange journey lasted for almost twelve hours, and during that time we only rested twice, for although the blacks are extremely lazy in their daily life, once they have something on hand

they will not pause until it is achieved. The women, as usual, were doing all the work. They held the bundles of food on their shaven heads, and the babies who were too young to walk were strapped to their backs. It must have been a most uncomfortable position for the children. They were tied so tightly, to prevent them from wriggling and disturbing their mothers' balance, that their faces were pressed close against their mothers' shoulders. I have often wondered if this method of carrying babies is responsible for the extreme flatness of the African native's nose.

At length, after following a track which my companions seemed to know well and which penetrated deeper and deeper into the forest, we arrived at what appeared to be our destination. The women set down their bundles and clustered into little awed groups; the men gathered excitedly round the Chief; all the chattering ceased. We had come, as I was soon to learn, to the “Place of the Gods.”

These gods, objects of profound devotion on the part of the natives, were not stone or wooden idols; they were not tall trees or mighty rocks. They were wild beasts, the strangest and most mysterious beasts which haunted Africa: Gorilla, pythons and crocodiles. It is not difficult to see how the superstitious mind of the savage has invested these three creatures with supernatural powers. Even to the civilised, enlightened man, there is something weird and unnatural about the

snake, crawling silently through the secret places of the jungle and only stopping to strangle some luckless animal in its mighty folds. The crocodile is equally dreadful and awe-inspiring, seeming, as it lies motionless on the river bank, to be the relic of some bygone age when scaly monsters slithered evilly through the mire: while the Gorilla is still King of the Jungle, and a god in his own right.

Religion, among the natives of Africa, differs a great deal among the various tribes. Most of them agree that there is one supreme god, the creator, who having made the world and its inhabitants takes no further interest in his creation, and never interferes with it or helps it. No prayers or sacrifices are offered to this vague and unresponsive deity, and mention is rarely made of him. But it is in connection with the horde of inferior spirits that the differences in belief and cult lie. Some tribes believe that these lesser gods, all of whom are malevolent and must be appeased and placated with prayers and offerings and attentions, inhabit trees and brooks, and even dwell in the wind, the fire, and the rain. Others think that the air is full of a host of disembodied spirits who can be induced to enter *ju-jus* and submit to the will of their owner by the machinations and spells of the Witch Doctor. Still other tribes, and my companions were of this order, believe that the bodies of animals are the chosen homes of the gods, and that the animals have to be placated accordingly. Only by constant atten-

tion and management can the malevolent beasts be kept in a state of contentment, and only when they are contented will the crops be good, the wives faithful and the battles end in victory. It is, of course, a religion of fear, and the worship is an almost despairing attempt to induce the gods to be merciful. Nevertheless I found that the natives were really sincere and devout in their belief, and that death was the only possible punishment for anyone who dared to offend the animal spirits.

The “Place of the Gods” was a part of the forest, many acres in extent, which had been fenced roughly in by the natives and fashioned as a place of worship. It was a sort of animal sanctuary, made so that Gorilla, crocodiles and snakes might be encouraged to frequent it. The particular part to which I had been brought was a dismal clearing, through which ran a muddy, sluggish stream. Here the gods came down to eat and drink, and here they were periodically fed and worshipped. The banks of the stream were considered by the natives to be holy ground, and all strangers were forbidden to set foot upon them. Everyone, even the Witch Doctor, trod with caution on this sacred spot, and it was here that all wrongdoers and enemies were flung to perdition, a prey to the voracious gods. I did not realise then how lucky I was to escape such a terrible death.

Having set down their belongings and assembled round the Chief, the natives began their hideous

worship, under the instructions of the Witch Doctor, who stood close by the Chief directing operations and brewing strange concoctions in the multitude of calabashes which his faithful followers had brought for him. In the centre of the clearing the worshippers constructed a tunnel or bower of reeds, plucked from the banks of the sacred stream, on top of which they placed birds' feathers, carved ivory emblems, and bright shells. Round it many fires were lighted, and then the ceremonial dance began, to the accompaniment of a large number of drums of all shapes and sizes.

There are many different drums in Africa. Tree-trunks are hollowed out to form a drum, about four feet high, which is beaten with the knuckles. Large bamboos have animal skins stretched over them and are played with the feet. The smaller drums are made from the calabash, which is cut in two, covered with a skin, and tapped on with the fingers. All these have a different tone, and they can be used to send long and complicated messages to the initiated. Now they were being worked up into an orgy of sound, in order to rouse the men and women to a high pitch of religious fervour. Soon they had all combined into an intoxicating rhythm, and the blacks were fast working themselves into a frenzy, stamping in a circle and then stooping and running through the reed tunnel.

I stood to one side of the clearing, two stalwart warriors keeping guard over me, watching the dance. The flickering firelight cast weird shadows

on the leaping forms of the worshippers, and the ground resounded with the stamp of their naked feet. From time to time one of the dancers would leave the wild circle and rush to the Witch Doctor as he stood at the entrance to the reed bower. There he would receive a calabash, and, panting from his exertions, drain it at a gulp, and return to the dance with renewed fervour.

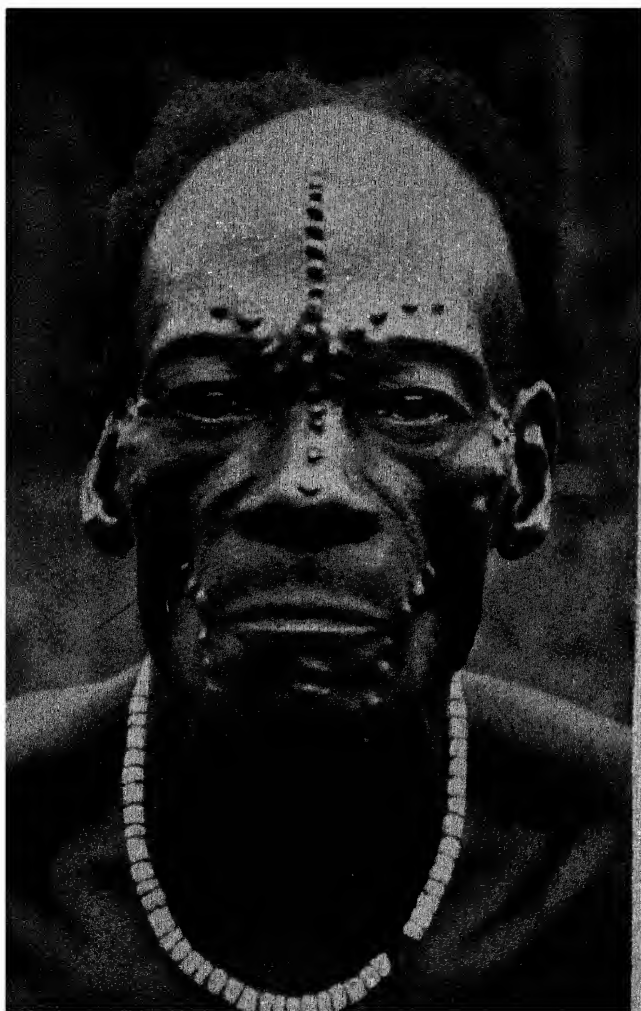
The dancers were all men, and soon the majority of them were crazed with drink. Scattered around were the calabashes in which the potent fluids had been brewed. These potions were mainly made of palm wine, but the Witch Doctor had brews of his own which he mixed with the wine and so rendered his dupes even more crazy. The women were sitting round in a rough circle clapping their hands and keeping up the monotonous chant. One or two of them were obviously drunk and had fallen into a stupor. In the darker corners love-affairs were being carried on, wantonly and without shame.

But my eyes were continually returning to the dancers. They swayed ceaselessly from side to side, stamping out the haunting rhythm and staring, as though mesmerised, in front of them. Then, suddenly, with the change of rhythm they burst into violent action, brandishing their spears and giving a great shout. This would last for a round or two and then the more monotonous dance would begin again. But it was noticeable that each outburst was more violent than the last. Soon the Witch Doctor would have them roused

to such a pitch of frenzy with his fiery concoctions that they would do anything that he wished and obey his behests without a second's thought.

He, all this time, stood silently by the reed tunnel, doling out his intoxicating beverages. Then suddenly, as though the crucial moment had arrived, he took up a number of polished knuckle-bones and began tossing them up into the air. When they fell to the ground he started to prance around them as they lay there, and finally let out a wild, high-pitched shriek, a sound diabolical in the extreme. Immediately the dancers stopped dead. Some staggered drunkenly as they stood, others fell sprawling to the earth; but one and all, in whatever posture they were, kept their eyes fixed on the medicine-man, as though unable to free themselves from the awful fascination. It was at this point that I began to take part in the festival of worship, and gradually I started to comprehend the hideous duty that had been appointed for me. I was ordained to feed the gods.

Amid the deathly silence, broken only by the crash of a stupefied warrior as he fell to the ground unconscious, the Witch Doctor sidled towards me, his painted body bent almost double and the bladders round his waist flapping grotesquely. He looked so horrible as he crept nearer and nearer, distorted by the shooting firelight, that I no longer wondered at the superstitious dread with which the natives regarded him. He might have been a hideous little carven idol come to life. The



(By Courtesy of the K.B.M.U.)

AN AFRICAN WARRIOR

warriors fell back fearfully as he approached, and he came up to me and tapped me three times on the chest with his bones. He spoke some word which I could not understand, and immediately three women walked slowly forward, carrying garlands of flowers which they proceeded to hang round my neck. As they retreated they bowed before me.

At first, finding myself decked with garlands, I came to the conclusion that I was to be sacrificed to the gods, whose identity was then unknown to me. I soon discovered that this was not the case. Apparently the successful way in which I had overcome the ordeal by poison had convinced the natives that I was no normal being, and they had decided that their animal spirits would greatly appreciate being fed by so powerful a person. Accordingly, I was even now being initiated into the high office of “ Chief Feeder ” to the gods, and the wild dance had been, although I was not aware of it at the time, held partly in my honour.

The Witch Doctor continued to work his spells and perform his magic incantations. The process of initiation to which I was subjected was a lengthy one, for I had to be marked with the signs of the spirits and rendered acceptable to them. First I was sprinkled with a strange red powder which stuck all over me like glue and which, apparently, the gods would mistake for blood. They would, therefore, permit me to approach them. A string of talismans, little crude clay figures, beads and shells, was hung around my

neck. A horn, roughly carved, was placed in my hand. Then the main part of the rite was carried out. In response to the Witch Doctor's peremptory command a goat was brought forward, though I had no means of telling where it had come from or in what place it had been hidden for the past few hours. It was a draggled, dirty animal, its long hair matted with mud and briars and one of its horns broken, but the natives evidently regarded it as a worthy sacrifice. The Witch Doctor bent down over the unfortunate creature, a curved knife in his claw-like hand, and with one thrust of the blade slit the goat's throat. As the blood flowed out, warm and red, he caught it carefully in an empty gourd. Then, throwing the still-twitching body of the animal to the earth, he held out the vessel to me and motioned me to drink its contents.

I could not choose but obey. The last time I had been told to drink, refusal had only meant that I was forced to swallow. So now, shutting my eyes and taking a deep breath, I drained the calabash at one draught. The blood was warm and salty but not unpleasant to the taste. I found that I had come through this second ordeal better than I had expected.

The Witch Doctor, having prepared me for my new duties (and what horrible duties they were I was to discover in a few hours' time), clapped his hands three times and shouted an order. In response to this the women came forward bearing in their arms the food which they had carried

through the forest on their heads. They laid the offerings before me, great lumps of meat already mildewed and smelling abominably, roots and herbs, fruits and berries, and then reverently retired, beating their foreheads on the ground and uttering soft, wailing cries. This went on until there was a pile of unappetising food all round me, and I was rapidly becoming anxious. What was I going to be forced to do ? And, above all, what and where were my unknown charges ?

As soon as the sacrifices had been deposited the natives began to stagger away, scarcely able to stand from exhaustion and intoxication. From the awed look on their faces I came to the conclusion that the actual process of feeding the gods was too sacred a rite to be gazed on by the common herd. It was a process in which only I, in their opinion a superior being to themselves, was to be allowed to participate. So they left me and went on their way, until at last there was only the Witch Doctor and myself in the dismal clearing. For a moment the thought of escape flickered across my mind, but even as it did so the medicine-man, as though he could read my thoughts, showed me as clearly as possible that the clearing was surrounded by an invisible guard of blacks, and that escape from their unsleeping vigilance was out of the question. He pointed out to me also the exact spot on the river bank where I was to place the food for the gods, the place where, presumably, they came down each night to drink. Then, with a last look into my face, and a final

exhortation not to attempt to escape, he slipped between the trees and was gone.

So I was left alone in the steaming darkness, with unknown dangers all round me, to serve the gods.

CHAPTER XIV

MY FRIENDS "THE GODS"

FOR some time after the Witch Doctor had disappeared from sight I stood in the middle of the clearing where he had left me, the pile of putrefying meat around me, trying to realise the predicament in which I was placed. It all seemed like a bad dream. The haunting sound of the drums still throbbed in my ears ; the leaping forms of the dancers still flickered in the firelight before my eyes ; I could still taste the warm, fresh blood in my mouth. Yet now I was quite alone in the silent forest, with the tropical night rapidly descending and enveloping the clearing in a thick pall of darkness. It seemed to me that the atmosphere was an evil one, as though the degrading scenes of worship which I had but lately witnessed were part of the very spirit of the place. I felt that crimes had been committed there that would be too terrible to describe. I longed above all things to escape from the evil place, but I felt so sure that the Witch Doctor's boast of an invisible guard was no idle one that I made no attempt to find a way out. I knew that at the first moment I should be impaled without mercy on a native spear.

I remained in this dazed condition for a long time, until all at once I heard a soft, plaintive bleating close by. Looking round, I saw on the far side of the clearing, at the entrance of what appeared to be a sort of rocky cave, a little kid tethered. I had not noticed it before, and had no means of telling how long it had been there or who had left it, but I presumed that it had been placed there as an offering to one of my sacred charges. I went over to it, and the playful little creature strained at its leather thong and butted me with its budding horns. I almost made up my mind to release it, but I knew that it would never manage to survive a night in the forest, with ravenous animals waiting to pounce from every branch, and so I decided to leave it tethered before the cave where I had found it.

The cave, as far as I could make out in the gathering darkness, was formed of large rocks and boulders which had somehow found a permanent resting-place on the bank of the stream. It was only a shallow cavity, but so thickly overhung with twining ferns and creepers and fringed with such magnificent trees that it made an ideal lair for a wild beast. I wondered if any of the " gods " lived inside.

As I stood gazing at the ferny cavern, while the surrounding forest grew darker and darker, I suddenly heard a sound in the undergrowth to my right. It was a soft, stealthy rustle, as though some large object was dragging itself slowly over

the long, damp grass. One of the gods was coming down to be fed.

Unknown powers of evil, mysterious spells and witchcraft might be forces against which I could not contend. But no animal or reptile was ever able to frighten me, and when I realised that this so-called "god" was a living creature, solid, natural, and tangible, my fears deserted me. Indeed, at the thought that I was once more to come into close contact with an inhabitant of the jungle, my spirits rose considerably. With a feeling almost of welcome, I turned to that side of the clearing from which the noise was coming and prepared to meet one of the gods which I was to serve.

It was an enormous python. The reptile, whose gorgeous blue, green and gold markings were scarcely perceptible in the gloom, must have been quite thirty feet long, and I stood, a fascinated spectator, quite powerless to intervene, while it made its slow, determined way towards its prey, the tethered kid. Slowly, deliberately, occasionally pushing out its forked tongue, it came undulating over the wet ground, making a soft, slithering noise as it crushed the lianas beneath its great weight. Slowly and more slowly it advanced, until its head was about two feet from its cowering victim, and then coil by coil it brought up the rest of its body until it was in the shape of a spring. Poised in this way it lifted its head a foot from the ground, receded its neck into the shape of a letter "S," and then straightened

it again. It repeated this manœuvre many times. Then at last it moved slowly forward until it touched the hindmost part of its victim with its forked tongue. This tongue, incidentally, contains no venom but acts solely as a "feeler."

With its feeler-tongue the python worked slowly along the spine of the kid, which by now was completely paralysed with fear and made no attempt to move, until it reached the skull and the nose. Then, as the flickering tongue went up one nostril and the little creature moved convulsively, almost too quickly for me to see the python threw two or three of its coils round the ribs of its victim. I could hear a sound like the crushing of an egg-shell. The kid's ribs were broken, its heart burst, and it was killed in less than the twinkling of an eye.

The python now held the dead prey in its scaly coils until all convulsive movement had ceased. This was a long time, far longer than might be imagined. Then it slowly uncoiled itself and felt all over the shapeless mass of bones and skin with its tongue. When it eventually reached the broken mouth of the kid, the reptile's jaw gaped wide open, and it began the slow, tedious business of swallowing its prey. This process, which may go on for hours, fascinated me because it was so deliberate and automatic. The jaw gaped with its eight rows of back receding teeth, and, by a muscular action of the powerful neck, the mouse was pushed over the snout of the kid. In response

to this effort rippling convolutions went down the whole length of the reptile's body.

This regular operation, the gaping jaw, the violent effort, the long ripple, went on quite mechanically until the whole of the kid had passed from the gullet to the stomach of the snake. Even the hard little horns were swallowed with apparent unconcern. The "god" was, for a time, at any rate, replete, and it writhed slowly into the cavern to sleep off the effects of its huge meal.

I have examined and dissected many pythons since that memorable night when I first watched one of my sacred charges eat the sacrifice offered to it by its devout worshippers, and I have discovered many curious facts about them. They will, for instance, refuse to partake of any dead meat until they have first eaten a living animal. But once the live prey is killed, mangled and devoured they will eat a dead carcass, provided they are still hungry and the meat is still warm, and take very much less time to swallow it. They reject no scrap of their victims. The hair is dissolved almost immediately it has passed down the gullet of the reptile, the bones and flesh some time after. But all is dissolved in time. I have examined the castings of hundreds of snakes and have found that, especially when they have eaten animals with a great deal of bone, the residue is of a chalk-white and grey colour and almost as hard as concrete.

So passed my first night in the Place of the Gods. When I had assured myself that the python had

had its fill and would not emerge from the cave for some time I determined to have some rest. The memory of the nocturnal habits which I had followed during my life among the Gorilla, a life which had ended over a year ago, returned to me without a second's thought and I looked round for a suitable tree to make my eyrie. I soon picked one out, a tall *baobab* laced with lianas that made a convenient foothold, and I climbed up it. There I passed the remainder of the night, astride a forked branch, feeling once again the soft winds blow upon my face, and hearing anew the cry of the nightbird, the hiss of the serpent, the hoarse bark of the leopard. I felt, as I lay between sleep and waking, that if I looked down I would see my old Gorilla friend propped against the bole of the tree. Almost I could hear his pleased grunts as he saw me approach him, and feel his hairy arms encircle my shoulders; until I woke with a start to the realisation that my friend had been dead for over a year and that I was still alone.

When dawn was breaking I descended from the tree. Almost before I had reached the ground I heard a strange, guttural bark, a noise which I had heard many times before without realising what animal was making it. Now, as I approached the little stream which crept sluggishly through the clearing, I made an astounding discovery. The bark was being made by the huge crocodiles which infested the muddy banks under the guise of logs of moss-covered wood. When I beheld these

mighty saurians lying motionless half in and half out of the water it seemed to me that I had never seen anything quite so colossal and ancient. They were absolutely gigantic as they lay there with wide, many-toothed jaws and small, unblinking eyes. I felt as though they had been in that one place for centuries, that somehow they had been tranced into stone and would never move again.

I noticed, as I watched the crocodiles, that many small birds were stepping delicately in and out of their mouths, eating the insects and leeches which were caught between the rows of sharp teeth. These small creatures are, I believe, known as leech-birds. The crocodiles never attempted to molest them, remaining with open jaws while the living tooth-picks went about their work, and the birds did what they liked, hopping from fang to fang, picking insects from the very eyes of the reptiles and walking with impunity along their scaly backs.

For a time I stood fascinated by the apparently peaceful sight which I saw before me, until all at once I realised that several of the larger crocodiles were moving slowly towards me, champing their jaws, blinking their eyes, and gently waving their long, plated tails. At the same time I heard in the distance a low, plaintive wail. It came, presumably, from the native guards who were invisibly watching me, and I took it to be a signal : the time had come for me to feed the " gods."

Accordingly, I began to throw chunks of the reeking meat to the waiting crocodiles, and

immediately, as I hurled them into the stream, the water was lashed to boiling point. Everywhere were snapping jaws and flailing tails; the scaly monsters leapt almost out of the water in an effort to secure the choicest portions; the air was filled with the sound of flying spray, and clamping teeth and crashing bodies. Each crocodile, as it obtained a piece of meat, threw it up high in the air and caught it at the back of the throat, a necessary preliminary to swallowing. Each crocodile fought wildly for more than its rightful share. And what a banquet they had! I was so pleased to see their evident enjoyment of the food that I flung it all into the stream, entirely forgetting any other creatures that might come down to the sanctuary to eat the offerings of the natives.

The chunks of rancid meat had soon all disappeared down the gaping throats of the reptiles. When they found that no more were forthcoming they sank slowly down into the water, so that only the tips of their snouts were visible, and lay motionless, their small, unblinking eyes alone showing me that they were still conscious of my presence.

I left them then, satiated as they were with the food which I had thrown to them, and wandered away from the stream to the fringe of the clearing. This first encounter with my charges had disappointed me considerably. I felt that neither the huge python nor the greedy crocodiles would ever really regard me as their friend. The most I

could hope for was to be tolerated as a bringer of food, and yet how I longed for some animal to show me a little affection. If only I were back with my friends, the mighty apes, romping with them in the open clearing, playing hide-and-seek among the trees, or feeling their hairy arms go round my shoulders in a vast embrace !

So I mused, remembering those happy days of the previous year, until my thoughts were suddenly interrupted. I had been unconsciously directing my steps towards the spot where the natives had laid their offerings, and I was amazed to find that the bundles of roots and herbs had been tampered with. Some of them, indeed, had been carried away, and all around were signs of chewed leaves and pith, and broken branches. Looking down to the ground I saw, to my uncontrollable delight, the unmistakable marks of a Gorilla.

I set about making his acquaintance immediately, for my anxiety to see again one of my old beloved forest friends can well be imagined. I gathered certain fruits and delicacies, that I knew from past experience were favourites of the apes—docks, sugar-cane and sweet berries—and placed them on the edge of the clearing. Then I climbed to the first fork of a tree and awaited his coming. I had not long to wait. Soon I heard close at hand the short, sharp grunt which I knew so well, and out from the dense grass emerged a young Gorilla. He came cautiously at first, sniffing the air and preparing to flee at any sign of danger ; but soon he became reassured and began to gobble the

fruits and plants. I was scarcely able to prevent myself from approaching him there and then, uttering the low bark of welcome which I remembered so well. But I managed to prevent myself from such a rash action, knowing that I must go slowly and warily if I was to gain his complete confidence.

Having discovered that one of the "gods" of the tribe was indeed a Gorilla, I did all I could to win his confidence and friendship. I used to put the choicest foods that I could find for him at the fringe of the clearing where he usually emerged, and wait for him to come and take them. I climbed the trees and robbed the nesting birds to get eggs which he loved to suck. I called to him and spoke to him, and tried to show that I was no enemy but a loving friend. After a time, in response to my attentions, and to the Gorilla language which I uttered, he became very fond of me and I found that it was perfectly easy to approach him. I might have reared him from birth, so friendly and attached to me he grew. I gave him the name of Bo-Bo, the name of the chimpanzee who is now my dearest friend. It was a name which was easily pronounced, and which was not hard to remember on his part, having in its vowels something of the Gorilla grunt, and he answered to it perfectly.

Bo-Bo was the only Gorilla that I ever saw during my confinement in the "Place of the Gods," and he became my constant companion, my one consolation during those months of misery and

loneliness. After a time he even used to help me to throw the food to the other "gods." He was only about five years old, but in spite of that he was far bigger than I and must have weighed about twenty stone. Having no older Gorilla in the place to challenge his supremacy he was just beginning to feel himself the master of things. It was charming to watch him swaggering around the clearing, beating his breast and fighting imaginary foes.

We became inseparable. Directly I descended from my eyrie in the early morning, I would see him coming through the undergrowth, out into the clearing towards me. Sometimes his attention would be for a moment attracted by a large stone on the ground, and he would turn it over in the hope of finding scorpions or other insects beneath. But soon, when he had crunched them between his powerful teeth, he would come up to me and give me a friendly greeting. One particular trick he always practised. He liked to take my face in his two hands and put it gently in his mouth, at the same time making a low grunting sound of pleasure. I could never find the reason for this extraordinary caress, but, knowing that he never meant to harm me and having no fear, I allowed him to do as he pleased.

Sometimes I would tease him by climbing a little way up a tree, giving the Gorilla bark and then descending quickly to the dense undergrowth. Out he would come in search of me, and up would go his two hands to shield his eyes from the glare

of the strong sun. I would see his great head bobbing up and down among the canes and creepers, as he parted the tall grasses and wild bamboos to look for me, and then I would suddenly spring out in front of him. Immediately he saw me he came rushing out towards me, sometimes running upright, sometimes galloping on all-fours. It looked at first as though he would bowl me over, but just before he reached me he would stop dead in his tracks, shamle round and turn his back on me. I knew at once what he wanted, and stretching out my hands I would let my fingers wander up and down his shaggy spine, parting the long hair and trying to disentangle it where it was badly matted.

Having scratched and fondled him, and heard with delight his low grunts of pleasure, I would wander off down the clearing. He always accompanied me, bounding joyously from side to side and often stopping to pull up the young trees in order to pick juicy grubs from the roots. Sometimes he offered one to me, but although I hated to appear ungrateful I could never bring myself to eat it. He did not seem to mind, however, and whenever I accepted from him some juicy berries, and ate them instead, being more palatable fare than grubs, he grunted and gurgled like a pleased child.

Bo-Bo was indeed my saviour during those long months of semi-captivity. The other animals, the crocodiles and the gigantic python, grew to know me and to respect the hand that fed them, in a

lazy, aloof sort of way. But I was never able to regard them really as my friends. The way in which they came at my call, never making any attempt to molest me, was, I think, due more to the food with which they began to associate me, than to any great affection which they felt. I was amazed at the way in which they knew the particular time and place when they could expect to be fed. They seemed to realise when the natives were coming with their offerings, and I rarely had to summon them to the feast. Almost as soon as the worshippers had reverently departed, leaving the piles of meat around me and one little live creature tethered before the cave, I would hear the stealthy, rustling approach of the python, and the hoarse barking of the hungry and excited crocodiles.

But Bo-Bo, my Gorilla, loved me as much for my companionship as for the delicacies which I gave him: the sweet roots, the plantains, the succulent sugar-canes. He gobbled up the offerings, of course, greedily, but having done so he did not at once leave me, as the reptiles did. He stayed by my side, helping to relieve the monotony of my miserable predicament. Had it not been for him I often felt that in that dismal clearing, surrounded by the watchful eyes of my invisible guard, I should have gone stark, raving mad.

It was indeed a place of dread and terror. Each night I was forced to listen to the eerie whining of the animals as they came down to be fed, the barking and grunting of the crocodiles, the slither-

ing, stealthy movements of the great snakes. Each day I had to watch the huge saurians tearing to pieces the flesh which I threw to them, hear the loud snapping of their colossal jaws and watch the greedy, inhuman look in their little eyes. Whenever the natives came to bring the food, they left a little kid tethered before the cave, and I became an unwilling spectator of its death. Fascinated in spite of my horror, I waited for the snake to strike and crush its victim and to enforce it inch by inch down its vitals. No sooner had I turned from the sight, sickened, than I would see a monkey dart from a tree to catch a little bird, bite its head off and eat the brains. The dragged little body it would throw away like a sucked-out orange.

Everywhere I turned there was death, and the sight of one animal preying on another. When I had lived in unhampered freedom with my Gorilla friends the forest law of "Kill or be killed" had seemed a natural law. But here, in this place of evil worship, it seemed no more than the wanton destruction of life. Even I myself lived in constant fear of being maimed or mutilated by a band of frenzied natives, for I knew to what depths they could sink when they were indulging in one of their wild religious orgies.

On one occasion I was compelled to gaze on the most cold-blooded murder that I have ever seen. For days afterwards the memory of it haunted me and struck terror into my heart. A native girl of about fourteen years, in the full bloom of health

and youth, was thrown to the crocodiles. She had apparently been convicted for some crime, for which the punishment was death, and it was this horrible end that had been meted out to her. The warriors stood around the bank of the stream, looking at the grey forms which lay basking a little way off. Then one of them, in answer to a word of command from the Witch Doctor, picked up the cowering girl, who had been lying on the ground in a state almost of semi-consciousness all this time, and flung her into the water.

Immediately the stream was a whirling maelstrom of flailing tails and surf. The victim's shrieks were lost in the sound of heavy bodies lashing the water and the loud grunting of the monsters. Thick as a shoal of fish came the crocodiles, darting with incredible speed, as they always will when there is living flesh to be had. The whole place was a mass of snapping jaws and rearing bodies and curving, armour-plated tails. In a little while it was all over. The reptiles retired to the bottom of the stream with their prey; the water became tranquil once more; and only a dark stain on its smooth surface showed what a dreadful sacrifice had been offered to the gods.

It was small wonder that after witnessing this terrible spectacle I felt that I had indeed reached the very lowest dregs of human existence. There I was, in that evil, foul-smelling clearing, forced to do the will of these vicious murderers, men lower in the order of creation than the reptiles to

which they made sacrifices. Day in and day out I stayed there, growing more and more disgusted, more and more despondent and miserable, until I began to think that nothing would ever occur to alter my dreadful lot, and that I was destined to remain for ever the servant of the " gods."

CHAPTER XV

THEY MAKE ME A JUNGLE GOD

FOR seven dreary and terrible months I lived in the Place of the Gods, feeding my charges and gaining what little happiness I could from the love and companionship of my Gorilla friend. Every two days, early in the morning, I would hear the sound of distant tom-toms, and through the forest would come a band of native women, bearing in their arms food for me and for the sacred animals. Having approached within ten yards of me, they laid their offerings on the ground and retired. Their behaviour was always very respectful and reverent towards me : they bent low to the ground as they left my presence and walked away backwards, their eyes fixed on the ground. As soon as they reached the edge of the clearing, and felt the dark safety of the trees closing around them, they stood upright again and, turning tail, rushed precipitately through the forest, putting as much distance as they could between themselves and the fearful haunt of gods and spirits.

Once every month a festival would be held in the clearing, in honour of the animals. It was a ritual similar to the one in which I had partici-

pated on the day of my ordination as chief feeder of the gods. To the accompaniment of the ever-beating tom-tom, the warriors would come marching in procession through the forest, bearing tall shields on their left forearms, and brandishing spears in their hands. Once again, on arrival at the sacred place, they built the bower of reeds and began the ceremonial dance. While always, in the centre, was the Witch Doctor, his calabashes bubbling with evil and intoxicating brews.

On one occasion the dancing seemed to be the preliminary to a battle which was to be fought the next day. The participants were more crazed and frenzied than usual, and the medicine-man's beverages were of added potency. On this evening I was forced to witness an initiation ceremony which appalled me by its uselessness and cruelty. A tall young warrior, carefully selected by the Witch Doctor after due consultation with his knuckle-bones, was the victim. The ring of dancers stood silent as the Doctor sidled round them, only breaking into a subdued murmur when he stopped before the young warrior. He tapped him three times on the chest with one of the bones and then took out a knife and slashed each of the young man's cheeks twice, so that blood poured down his face. The warrior did not flinch or even wince while this was being done. The Witch Doctor immediately clapped wet clay upon the wounds and bound a rough bandage round the warrior's face. The dancing then began again.

This was evidently a preparation for the follow-

ing day. This young man would be expected to lead the warriors into battle and do deeds of daring in the coming tussle. The wounds thus inflicted would heal open, because of the clay, and the young man's face would be horribly mutilated. The hideousness of this was supposed to inspire terror in the hearts of his opponents, and certainly it would do so in the heart of anyone unused to the horrors of the native countenance. It is very like the Gorilla in features, which is as much as to say that it is ugly in the extreme, but when mutilated and painted it makes the face of the Gorilla merely homely by contrast.

So monotonous was my life in the clearing that I began to look forward to these monthly ceremonies almost with anticipation. I even longed to enter into the fantastic dancing and leap round wildly to the rhythm of the drums in order to relieve my pent-up feelings. But such exercise was denied to me. I was a being apart, what the South Sea Islanders call "taboo," and I was not allowed to mix with the common herd.

When the natives discovered my power over their "gods," their wonder and astonishment were boundless. I was never, of course, able to persuade Bo-Bo to remain with me when they were in the vicinity. At the first note of the drum, as it echoed through the still forest, he would abandon me, for a Gorilla will always avoid the black man unless he is attacked. I have heard of cases where Gorilla are said to have stolen small native children from their

mothers and brought them up as their own, but, while I would not say that this was in any way impossible, I never came across any evidence of its truth during my visits to Africa. A story such as I heard a little while ago, of a woman living in Egypt who had a Gorilla for father, I definitely do not believe. It was therefore quite impossible to get Bo-Bo to remain with me while natives were in possession of the clearing. Only when the last of them had disappeared from sight and sound would he consent to emerge.

Despite his diffidence, however, word soon got round that the Gorilla "god" and I were as brothers. My invisible guard, who were presumably relieved by fellow-members of the tribe about once a day, must often have seen the morning greetings which took place between Bo-Bo and myself each day. Often they must have been amazed at our friendly romps in the clearing and our affectionate caresses. Soon their drums were tapping out the astounding news to the rest of the tribe. Within a very short time an excited and incredulous procession made its appearance in the glade. Directly they caught sight of me the chattering ceased, and they gazed at me as though expecting to see their "god" leap from a tree into my arms. When I discovered the reason for their visit—for by now I had managed to acquire a considerable knowledge of their tongue—I tried to show them how absurd it was to expect the Gorilla to come out into the open with so many people about. At first they could not understand

my perfectly reasonable objections, until the Witch Doctor stepped forward. He was a man of considerable intelligence of a distorted kind, and he soon understood what I was trying to convey. With a few brief words he sent his followers cowering back to the village. Only he and the Chief, who by now was so ill that he could scarcely stand, remained behind.

Neither of the two men spoke to me. They crept softly away to a thick clump of trees at one end of the clearing and concealed themselves from view. This, apparently, was to be a test of my authenticity. Was Bo-Bo going to fail me?

Directly the Chief and the Witch Doctor were hidden, and all sounds of the banished warriors had died away, I walked towards the place where Bo-Bo usually emerged, luckily some distance from the watchers' hiding-place, threw back my head and gave the Gorilla call. For a moment I waited, wondering if in a few minutes' time I should be hailed as an impostor. Then close at hand I heard the sound of a heavy body crashing through the undergrowth. Bo-Bo was answering my summons!

He entered the clearing as usual at his favourite spot and came galloping towards me. When he reached me he stopped abruptly and performed his old trick of placing my head gently between his open jaws. Having stroked me and uttered his little low grunts of pleasure at seeing me again, he began to tug my arm. He was asking, I knew,

to play with me, and we set off across the clearing, playing a sort of "Touch Last" as we went. I hoped devoutly that the two spies were suitably impressed. For some time Bo-Bo and I played together, and then, as the sun grew hotter, he began searching for a shady place in which to rest. As he slept, propped as usual against the trunk of a broad tree, I went towards the Witch Doctor's hiding-place. But he and the Chief had gone.

After that vindication of myself many of the natives began to come, one by one, to see the astounding sight of a man and a beast playing and eating together. They watched so silently that I would not have known that they were there had it not been for the fact that occasionally, plunging through the long grasses that fringed the clearing, I stumbled upon the motionless figure of a crouching warrior. Directly he became conscious of my presence he started up affrighted, an awed look on his face, and fled away into the forest.

The Witch Doctor usually made his appearances late in the day, when the moon was beginning to touch everything with silver. The forest was a place of enchantment in those parts where the vegetation overhead was sparse enough to let the moonbeams through: elsewhere it was a hell of darkness in which there might gleam at any moment the bright green eyes of a leopard or a cheetah. But he seemed quite unafraid of traversing the long distance from the village to the Place of the Gods. Presumably he was con-

fident that his many charms and amulets would protect him from lurking beasts. He appeared to come almost from nowhere. Often as I was picking my way carefully across the clearing back to my eyrie I would find him standing in front of me, and he would acknowledge my presence with gestures and horrible grimaces. His painted face, with its terrible mutilations, looked absolutely unreal, lit up by the white light of the moon. I felt relieved when he left me.

The Witch Doctor, incidentally, despite the fact that it was chiefly owing to his intervention that my life was spared and my duties allotted to me, seemed to view me with ever-increasing distrust and suspicion. When, during the ceremonial dancing, he saw one of the more gullible of his subjects accord me the reverence due to a god, he would go up to him and murmur a few words in his ear, and the warrior would slink back half ashamed. But his firmest exhortations could not prevent an awed and fearful look from appearing on the faces of the worshippers as they approached me. It would, I suppose, have been comparatively easy for a man who wielded so much power over his subjects to dethrone me and lower me considerably in the estimation of the natives. But even in him, humbug and trickster though he was, there lurked a certain amount of superstition for anything that he could not understand, and I certainly came into this category. Never before had he encountered such a white man as myself, able to live alone and unarmed in the dense African

jungle, with snakes, Gorilla and crocodiles as my brothers. Never before had he seen a human being caressed by a mighty ape and apparently liking it. Presumably, when he had first decided that I was to become the feeder of the gods, he had thought that I would soon meet my death at the hands of the great Gorilla. Yet month after month went by, and still he found that the ape made no attempt to harm me.

In this way seven months passed. Every two days food was brought for me and my charges ; every month the religious rites were practised. It was so like, and yet so unlike, my earlier life in the forest. Then I had been free to come and go as I liked ; to change my place of abode every night if I so wished ; to venture off in search of new places and new animals. Now, although I was still living in the depths of the jungle, I was no longer at liberty. I was subject to the will of man. My position preyed so much on my mind that one day I did make an attempt to escape the vigilance of my guards. I chose the middle of the day, when the warriors might be expected to be taking their noon siesta, and left the clearing. Despite the heat, Bo-Bo was at my side, and together we pushed through the dense undergrowth. But I had not gone more than two hundred yards when a black figure loomed up menacingly in front of me, a long spear poised for action in his hand. I knew then that flight was impossible, as I had really known all along, and I made my way disconsolately back to the clearing.

Bo-Bo, at the first glimpse of the native warrior, had of course vanished from sight.

I did not know then, as I returned to my eyrie, almost weeping from mortification that the guard had foiled me with such ease, how soon I was to leave the Place of the Gods. Nor did I guess that my deliverer would be Bo-Bo, my beloved Gorilla friend. Yet it was that which was to happen.

One day, a few weeks later, I descended as usual from my eyrie only to find that Bo-Bo was nowhere to be seen. Instead of the sound of his heavy body pushing through the bushes to meet me there was nothing to hear but the humming of insects and the cries of birds. For a time it never occurred to me that anything might be amiss. I set about gathering my breakfast, thinking that some other animal, another Gorilla perhaps, had attracted his attention. But when the day drew on and there was still no sign of him I began to worry, and, leaving the clearing, I started searching in the surrounding vegetation. For a long while my efforts were in no way rewarded. I called repeatedly, but there was no response.

At last, when I had been searching for about three hours, I came upon him. He had made a nest for himself in a clump of bamboo, and there, on a heap of dry grass and withered canes, he was lying on his side, the picture of misery. I knew at once that he was ill. He seemed to have lost his mighty chest and podgy stomach. Instead, he was all drawn. I tried to get him to play, to come

out and romp with me, but he refused. He was listless and miserable. I searched round for some grubs and insects, but he would not eat them. He pushed my hand away and turned over on his side again. I gathered some juicy berries and held them out to him. He ate about two of them, as much as to say : " Well, I will do my best, as you got them for me, although I don't really want them " ; but the rest he was unable to swallow. Then suddenly, almost as though he were possessed, he sat up on his haunches and extended his arms towards me, whining softly as he did so. I went up to him. He put his arms round my shoulders to embrace me, let out a screeching yell which deafened me completely for a minute, and then relaxed, stiffened and died.

It was, of course, dysentery, the enemy of all forest animals. The parasites that enter the bloodstream of the mighty anthropoids had claimed another victim.

I could hardly realise that Bo-Bo, my close companion for nearly seven months, and one of the greatest Gorilla friends that I have ever had, was dead. I knelt by him and stroked his body, and wept bitterly. All that afternoon and evening I remained with him, and when night drew on and I was forced to leave him and seek the safety of my eyrie, I felt as though I were forsaking the only creature that had shown me any kindness since my capture about eight months before. If I had had any implements, and if I had been strong enough, I would have buried his body.

As it was, I was compelled to leave him where he was, a prey to any wild beast that might choose to eat dead meat.

The natives were not slow to hear of the disaster that had befallen their "god." Throughout the night I heard the drums sending forth their message, for the eyes of my guards were ever alert to watch my comings and goings. They must have known of the Gorilla's death almost as soon as I did. Echoing through the forest went the dull, hollow rumble, louder and louder until it seemed as though the whole land was vibrating with the sound. I stayed crouched in my tree-top, wondering if I should be held responsible for the disaster, and what the punishment would be.

The message of the drums soon reached the native village, and only a few hours afterwards I heard the sound of shouts and yells coming through the forest. The savages were no doubt coming to demand of me the reason why a "god" should die. Nearer and nearer they came, until I could hear the noise of pounding feet mingling with the sound of their voices. Then suddenly they burst through the undergrowth into the clearing, shouting loudly and waving their spears in mock battle. They advanced to within ten yards of me, making no attempt to touch me. Instead, they squatted down in the centre of the open space, the Chief in the middle, and proceeded to hold a lengthy palaver.

The inquiry into the death of the "god" lasted for a considerable time, during which the Witch

Doctor did all he could to throw the blame on to me. He talked a lot about poison, even professing to know the exact herb which I had administered to the Gorilla. But, luckily for me, the rest of the tribe could not be made to believe that I was the culprit. They had seen with their own eyes my power over the "gods," and they were firmly convinced that I was a god myself and therefore could do no wrong.

When the medicine-man had finished making his accusations and insinuations I began to speak myself. I tried to explain that the death of the animal was not due to man but to a higher God, who had taken the spirit of the Gorilla in order to give it a higher place, in the world of spirits rather than in the body of an animal. I pointed out that there was no reason to suppose that witchcraft had been at work, for were not the gigantic python and the crocodiles as huge and alive as ever? This explanation, poor as it was, seemed to satisfy them. Only the Witch Doctor seemed sceptical, but now he dared not contradict me for the natives appeared to have so high an opinion of me that they would allow no harm to come to me. In fact I believe that had the medicine-man tried any of his nefarious tricks on me he would soon have paid dearly for them.

At length the tribunal seemed to make up its mind. They were now without one of their "gods," the biggest and most terrible "god" that they had ever had, and they had to find a new deity to take his place. Surely there would be no better



GORILLA



NATIVE WOMEN PLAITING STRAW MATS

god than the strange white man, with his uncanny power over animals and his complete lack of fear?

It was not, of course, only my ability to handle animals that made the natives revere me so deeply. Luck had lately been on my side. For recently, during my sojourn in the Place of the Gods, it so happened that the affairs of the village had prospered. I learned, from the somewhat reluctant Witch Doctor, that the crops had been good, that a stray herd of wild deer had ventured near the compound and provided the tribe with a meat diet for many weeks, and that a battle had been waged against a neighbouring clan with bloody but victorious results. These fair events were apparently put down to my especial divine intervention, and the whole tribe was convinced that they were indeed fortunate to have in their midst so powerful and beneficent a god.

Accordingly, at the end of the palaver, I was respectfully bidden to prepare for a return to the village. When I learned that I was at last to be allowed to leave the place where I had lived alone for the last seven months, with only my dead friend for company, I was overjoyed. Now, perhaps, I would be able to find a way of escaping from these natives. Once out of their clutches, I felt that any part of Africa would be preferable to this particular part of the Gaboon territory to which I had been so long confined. I would go anywhere, as long as it was far enough from this never-ending sea of black bodies painted facse, and fixed, grinning mouths.

Meanwhile, I was pleased enough to leave the clearing and to let the natives form a reverent bodyguard around me. They took great care not to touch me for fear lest I should be angered at them and work them evil, and we walked slowly, preceded by the subdued beating of muffled tom-toms. Sometimes as we marched through the forest one of the young girls would gather a bunch of flowers, hibiscus and wild orchids, and throw them before my feet. Another would pick a long, trailing garland and throw it round my neck. All of them, before and after approaching me, would prostrate themselves humbly on the ground in front of me, seeming as though they desired me to tread on their bodies as I walked, and they vied with each other to see which of them could show most honour to the great new "god."

It was indeed a triumphal procession, with myself as the central figure, that wended its slow way through the darkening forest. I took precedence even over the old Chief, who was so weak and ill that he had to be carried along in a primitive sort of sedan chair, fashioned out of reeds and branches. His shrunken frame and dull, listless eyes made it evident that he had only a little while longer to live and I wondered who was destined to take his place. Usually, in the native tribes of Africa, the Chief's son is considered the most likely applicant, but he is not bound to inherit the title. Should he be deemed worthless or incompetent by the elders of the tribe, his inheritance is taken away from him and given to one of the warriors who

have proved themselves strong in battle. The Witch Doctor is never made Chief, his leadership of the natives being solely on the spiritual side.

Night was beginning to fall when we eventually arrived at the compound. I wondered vaguely how a god was supposed to conduct himself in the village of his worshippers. Should I be allowed to wander where I wished, or was I to be confined to one place? Were any duties to be given to me? As these thoughts flashed through my mind I discovered that my bodyguard had halted before the largest hut in the village, the Council Chamber. Respectfully they motioned for me to enter, bowing low and touching the palms of their hands many times on the ground. This then, I thought, as I entered the crude grass building, was to be the Temple of the God.

CHAPTER XVI

CHIEF OF THE TRIBE

I FOUND that the life of a god was singularly uneventful, and in my new and elevated position I had nothing at all to do. The Council Hut was furnished in a way befitting my rank : skins were placed on the floor and heaped up to form a couch ; primitive lights were strung from the hurdle-like walls ; even a roll of bright cotton cloth was there for the new deity to deck himself in. Food and water were brought twice a day and left just outside the entrance, and every evening a bevy of young men and maidens would come to the hut, chanting and bowing before me, and invoking my divine aid in their coming enterprises.

I was even allowed a certain amount of freedom. I could wander about the village, provided that I did not venture beyond the farthest kraal, and on condition that I returned to the hut before darkness fell. These regulations, imparted to me by the Witch Doctor, were given in the form of requests rather than orders. The man bowed low when he uttered them, and seemed fearful of incurring my displeasure. Nevertheless, he showed me quite definitely that I was to be given no chance of escape. A god who brought prosperity and good

fortune to the members of the tribe was too valuable an asset to be allowed to slip unheeded through their fingers.

Accordingly, whenever I went outside the hut I found it guarded by two warriors. They stood aside respectfully to let me pass, but, even so, I saw their hands tighten on their long spears and I knew that at the first attempt to flee I should be caught and what little liberty I had would be taken away from me. So I made up my mind to bide my time and await a favourable opportunity.

For the first week after my return to the village I noticed that everything seemed much quieter than it had been before. The women forsook their ceaseless chattering and giggling and walked about attending to their duties, with a strangely subdued air. The warriors did not venture once into the forest. Even the drums were silent. Mystified, I asked the medicine-man, a frequent visitor to my hut, the reason for this unusual quiet.

"It is the Chief," he answered. "He is about to die."

I remembered the sickly look of the old man when I had seen him last, the way in which he had been carried through the forest, and I was not surprised. More for the sake of appearing interested in the affairs of the tribe than for any other reason I inquired of the Witch Doctor the name of the Chief's successor.

"He has not been chosen yet," was the man's reply. "The Chief's son is a weakling and cannot rule. There will be a vote."

One morning, much before dawn, I was awakened by the mournful sound of a drum. It was a low, muffled throbbing, quite unlike the deep, resounding notes which I had always heard on the tom-toms before. Instinctively I knew that the old Chief was dead, and almost as soon as the realisation had flashed across my mind two warriors crept softly into the hut and stood beside me. Following them came the Witch Doctor, and his first words confirmed my surmise: the Chief had died in the night and the people were clamouring to know the will of their "god."

I asked of the Witch Doctor permission to go and see the dead Chief. He readily granted it to me, no doubt having a vague idea in his mind that I might be contemplating the performance of a miracle to bring the dead man to life. We walked through the compound to the hut of the leader and entered it. On the floor crouched the Chief's wives, weeping and wailing and mourning the passing of their lord. They seemed genuinely grieved at his death, despite the fact that he had never treated them with the slightest consideration during his lifetime, forcing them always to do his bidding, to fetch and carry for him, and to obey his least command. In the centre of the hut, curled up on a pile of leopard skins, lay the dead Chief.

He might have been dead for about a year, so closely did the flesh hang to the skeleton. The man who, despite his sickness, had borne himself with an air of royalty and dignity in life, in death

looked like a little dried-up Egyptian mummy. I asked the Witch Doctor what he intended to do with the body, but the man made only a non-committal reply. In his opinion funeral rites mattered little. He believed that the spirit of the Chief had passed into the body of one of the gods, that in the sacred place there would be now a new animal, and he cared little what happened to the old human body.

I, however, was anxious that the Chief should be given a decent burial. My reason was a twofold one: a dislike of the native custom, barbarous and callous in the extreme, of throwing dead bodies into the forest to be mauled and eaten by any passing beast, and a desire to instil into the native mind a certain respect for those of the tribe, especially the Chieftain, who died. I communicated my wishes to the Witch Doctor and he agreed to collaborate with me—whether because he realised that I was now the most powerful being in the tribe or because he still believed that I was a god whose word must be obeyed, I could not say. At any rate, he was anxious to fall in with my requests, and become my friend rather than my foe.

In tropical Africa when anything dies, animal or human, it is astonishing how quickly the putrefying action takes place. The stench in the Chief's hut was beginning to become almost unendurable, and I felt that the sooner the dead man was carried outside and buried in the forest the healthier it would be. Accordingly, I gave orders for a litter

to be made of branches, leaves and creepers. The Chief's body was wrapped in leopard skins, the head and face of one of the leopards covering his head and face, and he was taken from the hut and put upon the litter. The Witch Doctor marshalled together a string of the younger men, ordering the wives and maidens to remain in the village, and we set off on the funeral procession.

For two hours we marched slowly along one of the forest tracks. Although absolutely unused to anything of the same kind, the natives at once entered into the solemnity of the rite and walked with slow, careful steps and bowed heads. The four men who held the litter even began to chant softly and not unmusically. We reached a small clearing which seemed to me an ideal place for our purpose, and I directed the men to lay down the litter. But when I ordered them to mark out a place on the ground and begin to remove the earth with their spears I met with an unexpected obstacle : not one of them, even the Witch Doctor, would agree to burying the body of the Chief in the ground. He must be buried on a high platform.

I could find no reason for this unalterable decision on their part. The religious motive, if there was one, was completely obscure. But I felt it best to fall in with their wishes, and after a brief consultation with the Witch Doctor I directed them to cut tall branches and canes for poles on which the platform was to be built. When the erection was eventually completed it

was a pile fifteen feet high, the platform, of long grasses and creepers woven between branches laid lengthwise, being constructed upon the tall poles. Between the ground and the top of the platform a rough ladder of canes and creepers was built, and up this swarmed two agile natives, carrying between them the body of their Chief. When they reached the platform they laid out the body, still surmounted by the leopard skins, and climbed down again.

I tried to make the occasion as ceremonial a one as possible, in order to keep the natives interested and awed. Despite their undoubted viciousness, they were in many ways extremely childish: as long as they were kept guessing and amused their vices were coated by an appearance of good temper. I made them bow three times to the platform, ordered them to dance respectfully round it, and invented many other little things to impress them and hold their attention. I commanded them, while they danced, to lay their long spears before the platform to show that they still owed their allegiance to the Chief, although he was dead, and I made them light many fires in his honour.

While the rites were in progress the Witch Doctor, after a last low obeisance before the platform, slipped through the trees away back to the village. He did not inform me as to the reason of his sudden departure, but I judged that it was in connection with the death of the Chief and the affairs of the tribe, and I made no effort to detain him. When I judged that the ceremonial had pro-

ceeded long enough, and that the men were sufficiently impressed by my commands to obey me now without question of refusal, I marshalled them together again and started off on the return journey to the village.

Down the main thoroughfare of the compound, between the crude huts we marched. All the women came running out to greet us, shouting and yelling and chattering excitedly. The men who had remained behind also came to meet us, waving their spears high above their heads. Everyone seemed to be in a mood of great rejoicing. I was astonished at the high spirits of the villagers, considering how lately their Chief had died, but I assumed that their fickle minds found no difficulty in changing rapidly from grief to joy. As we progressed towards my hut, the temple of the god, I found that as usual I was the centre of attraction. The young women approached as near to me as they dared without actually touching me, the men formed a guard of honour around me and escorted me triumphantly back to my domain. When we had almost reached the end of the village the Witch Doctor came forward to meet me, and the first words which he uttered showed me in a flash the reason for all the gaiety and rejoicing. The elders of the tribe had been voting for their new Chief, and it was I, the white man, the god, the animal lover, who had been chosen to fill the part !

At first the full meaning of the Witch Doctor's words did not penetrate my startled brain, but

when it did I began to protest hurriedly. I had no desire to rule over the tribe ; my one wish was to escape from it as quickly as possible, and I told the medicine-man as emphatically as possible that, although aware of the honour which he and his fellows had done me, I preferred not to accept the position. But the Witch Doctor almost laughed in my face. Once a Chief has been chosen there was no gainsaying the decision. The only alternative, even to a god such as myself, would be death.

Life, even in the most trying and terrible of predicaments, is preferable to death. Always there lurks some slight hope of escape. So I agreed, looking, I hope, better pleased than I felt, to become the Chief of the tribe. In this way began my rule over about three hundred blacks in the heart of the Gaboon country.

All that day we feasted and made merry, and I felt glad that I had made such a point of the Chief's burial. The natives were not slow to show their appreciation of all ceremony and ritual, and the dancing and other rites which I had ordered to be performed before the funeral platform, had shown them that I was a leader after their own hearts. They capered round me, bringing flowers and garlands for me to deck myself in. Some even went into the Chief's hut and brought out his shabby cloak of feathers, which they threw around my shoulders. When night came and the fires were lighted, the women congregated in the centre of the village and began to sing. Most of them had

very good voices, rich, resonant and powerful, and although the songs were chiefly low wails and chantings, mingled with a few staccato shouts, the result was not unmusical. The warriors, meanwhile, behaved almost as though they were lunatic: they jumped wildly into the air, threw their spears at each other in mock battle, and waved their shields. Some began wrestling matches, giving every appearance of trying to kill their opponents; others climbed nearby trees and started to throw branches and nuts at the wild throng below, for all the world as though they were monkeys. I, for my part, did not in the least object to the games and the dancing. As long as the natives paid me the respect due to my position, and made no attempt to interfere with me, I let them continue as they liked. I often think that had I made a determined effort to escape from the compound that night, with all the blacks crazed with drink and excitement, I might have succeeded. True, the Witch Doctor remained leech-like at my side, but even he could not keep his eyes fixed on me indefinitely. However, I was beginning by now to feel a faint interest in my new role; I was wondering how closely the warriors would obey my commands and do my bidding. And for that night, at any rate, the thought of escape did not once enter my head. Later I was to find myself always surrounded by a powerful and vigilant body-guard, and the chances of eluding it almost non-existent.

The only objectionable part of my chieftainship

was the fact that I was given the old Chief's hut as a dwelling-place, and it was indescribably dirty, reeking with insects, fleas and filth. As far as I could see, it had not been cleaned out during the whole of the man's long rule over the tribe. Being in a position of undisputed authority, however, I could give what orders I liked, and I commanded a hut to be built for me at a slight distance from the others, on a little piece of high ground. Thatched very thickly, to keep out the scorching rays of the sun, and furnished with as clean skins as I could find, it made a comparatively satisfactory abode, and I became for a time quite resigned to living there.

Wives were offered to me in abundance. I could have had as many as I wanted. All the unmarried maidens in the village coveted the honour of being the Chief's wife and they came to me in hordes, prostrating themselves before me and parading their charms. I picked four of them, not because I desired them as wives but because I thought that it would impress the rest of the village. One of them I appointed to cook for me and prepare my meals; one to do all the fetching and carrying; one to weave grass blankets to complete the furnishing of my hut; and one to keep the hut clean. They were all surprisingly jealous of each other: if one of them attempted to do more than her fair share of the work, the others were upon her like three wild cats, beating her with their closed fists and scratching her face with their sharp nails. They hated me to admonish

them, accepting my rebukes with sullen, downcast eyes, and feet scraping unwillingly along the ground. When I praised them, however, they opened their mouths in a wide, white grin and sidled up to me with the most obvious expressions of pleasure on their black faces. At night-time one of them would light a fire in front of the hut, a sure way of preventing any animals from becoming too venturesome, and they would all four squat round it on their haunches and begin their inevitable chanting.

My four "wives" were not exactly the domestic servants that I should have chosen: they were lazy, dirty and not at all prepossessing. I found it advisable for my peace of mind never to inquire too closely into the nature of the concoctions which my cook put before me, nor as to the state her hands when she prepared them. As for the girl who cleaned my hut, she looked at me with something like pity in her eyes when I suggested to her that she might use a broom, fashioned out of palm leaves tied to a bamboo cane, to sweep the floor. Nevertheless, I became quite used to them after a time, especially after they had learned my likes and dislikes and had come to know exactly what they could and could not do. Had I known at the time that it was by the help of one of them that I was later to be able to escape, I might have appreciated them even more.

CHAPTER XVII

CREATING A JUNGLE UTOPIA

MY rule over the tribe of Gaboon blacks lasted for six months or thereabouts, and during that time I was fed and feted on the fat of the land. Not that that amounted to very much : the natives were so poverty-stricken and lived on such meagre supplies that the veriest banquet given in my honour consisted of little more than a few roots, berries and mealie cakes, with an occasional piece of flesh. My subjects, however, seemed to like me and were very anxious to please me. In their childish and primitive way they did all they could to win my favour and approbation. The Witch Doctor alone refused to join in the general adulation, whether because he was jealous of my popularity or thought it unbefitting his dignity, I could not tell. I was careful always to consult him before making any arrangements, for I knew that it would be a good policy, and better for my personal safety, if I kept him on my side. Moreover, once my plans had been submitted to him for his approval and he had agreed to them he could not very well find fault with them or gainsay me. He was, too, despite his viciousness, a shrewd man, and he realised that

through my influence the tribe might very well become exceptionally rich and prosperous.

I was determined that if I was indeed to be Chief over the tribe I would do all I could to improve its way of living. I had no wish to change the religion or essential make-up of the natives : all I did was to apply my superior knowledge to their very primitive conditions. Had they been animals, living in a natural state, I would have made no attempt to improve or alter their lot. As it was, however, they were human beings living in a state of semi-civilisation which seemed horrible to me.

The filth of the village, and the unwashed appearance of the inhabitants, had always sickened and disgusted me. My subjects made not the slightest attempt to keep themselves or their huts in even an animal state of cleanliness : a wild beast would have scorned to live amid the stench and dirt of the compound. So I felt that the time had come for me to try to introduce some practical reforms in this direction. Any advanced hygiene or sanitation was, of course, quite out of the question, but I decided that if I could but induce them to wash themselves and clean their huts about once a fortnight I should have accomplished something.

The easiest method of instituting reforms would have been to start completely from scratch, leaving the old village and moving to a different part of the forest to build a new one. But this idea was impracticable at the moment : the time of harvest

was approaching and the corn and mealie fields could not be left. So I decided to do what I could in the old village, in order that when the time came for an exodus the natives would have some little knowledge of how to keep their new dwellings more habitable.

I first turned my attention to the people themselves. I taught them to go down to the streams and rub the wet mud all over their bodies, to let it cake on for an hour or so and then wash it off with water. This primitive soap cleansed their hides considerably and rid them of many irritating insects, so that they must have derived great benefit from their mud-baths and ablutions. I also showed them how to rub their teeth with bark, and how to chew certain roots and twigs, in order to prevent caries of the teeth, a disease very prevalent in Africa, both among animals and natives. In fact, by this care for the health and comfort of my subjects I became more than a Chief: I was a medicine-man as well.

Long ago I had found it necessary to keep the natives always amused. Once their childish interest was aroused they were happy and contented. In order, therefore, to provide them with innocent amusement and exercise I taught them to play an ancient Arab game called *Lick*. It was a game rather like Bowls, only played with flat, heavy stones instead of balls, and it kept the players intrigued and excited for hours. Any number of them could take part; and on more than one occasion the whole village joined in.

It was played in this way : a small round stone was placed in the centre of the clearing, and behind it the players heaped a few prizes, beads, buttons and other little trinkets. Then in turn they chose a large flat stone, walked about twenty yards away and threw their missile at the mark. The man whose stone pitched nearest to the heap of trinkets was adjudged the winner and invited to select his prize from the pile. The game continued in this way until all the beads and trinkets had been won.

While the men were thus engaged, hurling their stones with much shouting and gesticulation, I used to visit the women and try to show them how they could improve their lot. I taught them how to sweep out the floors of their huts with brooms made of palm leaves and bamboo, how to scour their calabash pots with mud and dry earth, and how to make a rough sort of butter by tying goats' cream in skins and shaking it rhythmically up and down. I soon found that the easiest way to teach them was by instructing my four " wives " first. The other women of the village began to imitate them almost immediately.

I also tried to make a few improvements in the primitive agriculture which they practised. The mealie fields, for instance, were often without water. This deficiency had previously been supplied with water carried in calabashes and gourds, but I showed the women how larger quantities could be carried in animal skins, and how these skins, by means of holes bored with a knife and

threaded with strong resilient creepers or leather thongs, could be sewn together. Under my instructions the women also lopped off the slender branches of the trees and plaited them while still green into stout hurdles. The few lean and mangy cattle which the village possessed used to have a habit of straying from the *boma* into the forest, and once that had happened the chances of finding them again were almost negligible. But with a strong enclosure in which to corral them I thought that the number of beasts would not lessen so considerably.

In spite of their lack of any real adult intelligence my subjects were not slow to learn the lessons which I taught them. They came to regard me in the same way that little children regard "grown-ups": as a being who could do no wrong. They took careful note of my every movement, they imitated my least little action, they were constantly watching for me to do something new. After a time their brains even began to develop slightly, and they started to invent small things for themselves. As for myself, I had to take great care of my behaviour in order that the natives would know what was best to copy.

I had always regretted the warlike nature of the tribe over which I found myself Chief. Week after week I discovered that the ritual dance in the Place of the Gods was not so much a ceremony of worship as a preparation for battle, and that the Witch Doctor was whipping his dupes into a frenzy of intoxication in order that they would rush

hysterically off through the forest to meet their foes. I came to the conclusion that much of the spoil derived from a victorious conflict went to the Witch Doctor, and that it was his greed, therefore, that caused so many bloody battles. Seeing this, I determined to show the natives, and the medicine-man in particular, that prosperity could come with peace as well as with war.

The native battles were always arranged beforehand. One morning a contingent of stranger warriors would arrive in the village and march up to the Chief's hut. There they would make complaint that their cattle had been stolen, their wives carried off, or their fields raided. The crime had been traced to the inhabitants of this village, and as a result they declared war on them and would do battle the following day. The tribe of natives accused of the crime, nothing loth, agreed on the time and place of the encounter, and both sides departed to prepare themselves with dance and drink for the coming fray. When the next day dawned the warriors were up early, strapping on their skin shields and waving their tall spears and hunting-knives. After a certain amount of preliminary they started off through the forest, led by a young tribesman who had been selected and initiated the night before. All the young children, the wives and maidens, ran to the edge of the clearing with the warriors, laughing and yelling and cheering them on. Once the men had disappeared into the undergrowth, however, they sauntered back to their huts and began their usual

tasks, to all outward appearances quite unmoved by the fact that some of their husbands, certainly, would never return.

I never witnessed a native battle, but I gathered from the Witch Doctor's lurid descriptions that as soon as one side or other capitulated the victors had the right to demand retribution for the number of their dead. Spoils, therefore, in the place of dead men, were often brought back to the village after a successful engagement. Most of it, as I have said, went to the Witch Doctor's hut, but a certain amount was handed over to the relations of any men who had been killed.

About a month after I assumed the position of Chief, three strange warriors were brought one morning to my hut. With the help of the Witch Doctor, who had appeared as if from nowhere directly he learned that something was afoot, I discovered that some of my subjects had been caught trying to round up a herd of cattle. The only possible result, said the spokesman of the strangers, a tall, muscular warrior with a thick brass ring hanging down from his nose and each ear, was war.

This, I felt, was my chance. Instead of proceeding as usual with arrangements for the time and place of the battle I invited the envoys to enter the Council Chamber and hold a palaver. They were, I think, too surprised to do anything but obey, and once inside and seated on couches of leopard skins, they could not help listening to my words. I talked for a long time. I let them

know that I realised the gravity of my subjects' offence and that the men would be suitably punished. But, I pointed out, as the cattle had not actually been stolen but were, in fact, safe in their owners' hands, a battle seemed rather useless and unnecessary. How much better it would be if we could arrange a little trade, an exchange of goods for the mutual benefit of the two tribes. I was sure that in place of some baskets of our mealie cobs, which were ripening particularly well this year, our visitors could let us have perhaps a couple of head of cattle.

This was an astounding idea to the natives. Trade with the white men on the coast they were used to, but trade among themselves, and as an alternative to war, was an unheard-of procedure. Before they had time to reply, however, with suitable vituperation I have no doubt, I requested them to come outside and see the improvements which I had effected in the life of the tribe. I showed them the huts of my subjects, merely dirty now instead of absolutely filthy, and the palm leaf brooms with which I had taught the women to sweep the floors. I took them over to the place where the few meagre kine were kept and showed them the well-woven fences. But it was when we happened to come across a party of men playing the game that I had taught them, that the enemy warriors really decided that there must be something in my proposal. Although they were full-grown men, warlike and bloodthirsty, they wanted to join in immediately, and when I showed them

what to do and one of them chanced to hurl his stone nearest to the mark and win a prize, their delight knew no bounds.

So the strangers went away in peace, although they certainly had not come with that intention. They left the village bearing over their shoulders skins full of mealies and gifts of bright buttons and trinkets for their Chief. In return they promised to return in a few days' time with equally munificent presents. It really seemed as though I had impressed them considerably, for they did all they could to persuade me to accompany them back to their village. It was, indeed, a wonder that they did not try to steal me to be their Chief.

I think that the Witch Doctor never forgave me for this interference with his rights. He could not accuse me of taking away his income, for by means of the arbitration and subsequent bartering which I instituted instead of warfare he received many more skins, trinkets and pieces of flesh and ivory than he had done before. But he felt that by my peaceable methods I was removing all his power, that there was now no occasion for his dances, his orgies, his intoxicating brews, and that soon he would have no hold at all over the tribe.

He could not openly derogate me, however. I was far too popular among my subjects, who regarded me as an omnipotent being. It so happened that during my rule the affairs of the tribe prospered, and all the good fortune was laid at the door of the beneficent white Chief. Plenty of

rain had fallen early on in the year, which meant that the crops had grown and ripened remarkably well. For the same reason the grass in the clearing had sprung up lush and green, and the two or three cattle fattened. Besides these natural benefits which were ascribed to my power, the fact that the wives of the village were less quarrelsome and more faithful to their husbands was also attributed to me. There was, I think, a certain amount of rich truth in this, because under my careful tuition the women had grown increasingly industrious, and, having so much to learn and practise, had less time for idle or immoral pursuits. In order to keep their minds and bodies busy I arranged many little things to instruct and amuse them, and they became happier and less vicious in consequence.

As a result of these improvements in the life of my subjects, and the way in which their affairs flourished under my leadership, the tribe became a byword among others of the Gaboon country. Instead of stranger warriors coming in battle array to war with us, they came in peace, bringing presents and respectfully desiring that I would teach them some of the things which I had taught my own tribe. I even felt that, had I so desired, I could have united many of the scattered tribes into one community and ruled over a large section of the land. But I had no wish to extend my power, and although I was now happier than I had been for a long time and had much to interest me, there still lurked in the back of my mind the

possibility of escape and a return to the life of the Gorilla.

My rule over the tribe proceeded in this way until over half a year had passed. During that time the harvest had come and gone, and the small trees which I had instructed the natives to plant round the outskirts of the village to form a sort of fence were by now straight young saplings. My life, although in no way comparable to my earlier existence in the depths of the forest, when I had roamed everywhere in unfettered freedom, had enough incident in it to relieve it from monotony. Indeed, when I contrasted it with those horrible months spent in the Place of the Gods I felt almost contented. There was always something to be done, some new lesson to be taught or improvement to be made, and I was never idle. Day succeeded day so placidly that I began to feel as though I were going to remain Chief of these Gaboon natives for the rest of my life. The idea of escape receded further and further away.

Had I thought at all about the tranquillity of my existence I might have realised that it was unnatural for the natives to be so peaceable, that the atmosphere which I was experiencing was only the calm before the storm. As it was, I never thought for one minute that in less than a month I should be fleeing from the village, a victim of the Witch Doctor's hate and jealousy and no longer Chief of the tribe.

CHAPTER XVIII

MY ENEMY THE WITCH DOCTOR

IT was the Witch Doctor himself who eventually made me realise that the sooner I quitted the semi-civilisation of the Gaboon tribe the better it would be for the safety of my skin. Up till now he had never attempted any open rebellion, merely showing me by his scowls and ferocious mutterings that he was bitterly jealous of my popularity and wished me all possible harm. But at length his evil feelings reached such a pitch that he was unable to contain them any longer. His envy and malice became too great to be hid.

He began his campaign against me by working on that very aspect of the native mind—which had accepted me as a god in the first place : its superstitiousness. He knew that once he could convince the blacks that my godhead was in question he could easily persuade them that I was no longer a worthy man to be their Chief. Despite his machinations, I doubt whether he would have succeeded in his designs, for my popularity with the tribe was very great, were it not for the fact that Fate, so long my ally, now completely deserted me and played straight into the hands of the enemy.

It so happened that one of my serving-women

fell ill and I was forced to employ another one in her place to cook for me. The new girl, anxious to please her lordly master, went bounding off into the forest to gather fruits and nuts for my supper, but being over-eager to secure a choice prize she slipped from a high branch and crashed to the ground. When they picked her up her neck was broken.

This was indeed a calamity. Ordinarily the death of one of the women would have caused not the slightest stir in the community. Her body would have been taken up with scant ceremony and thrown into the bush. No one, not even her husband or her parents, would have bothered to mourn her passing. But now the Witch Doctor saw his chance, and he took it without the least hesitation.

Once an idea becomes fixed in the mind of a native it is completely immovable. No proof, however obvious, no reasoning, however lucid, will make him change his point of view or shake his stubbornness. The fact that one of my "wives" had fallen ill and one had died meant that the natives would ever afterwards associate me with the misfortunes of these women. My subjects, although they were still as servile as ever, began to look upon me with an awe that was tempered with doubt and distrust. Instead of following me about, alert to imitate my actions, they started to shun me. I was no longer a benevolent "god," to be loved and worshipped: I was a fearful being to be appeased and placated.

The Witch Doctor, of course, was quick to seize

the opportunity offered to him. He began to drop hints and make muttered insinuations. Soon whisperings were heard in the village and little groups of men gathered in obscure corners and murmured together, only to disperse quickly directly I put in an appearance. I no longer commanded the unquestioned respect that I had done before, and I felt that my prestige and authority were being slowly but methodically undermined.

Worst of all was the attitude of the women. They seemed to think that I possessed the evil eye, that none of them was safe in my presence, and instead of fawning round me as they had done formerly, begging for favours and eager to serve me, they kept as far away from me as they could. Even my "wives," who had been so proud of their position before, found excuses to leave me. In turn they informed me, sullenly and with ashamed yet fearful faces, that they could work for me no longer, until only one of them was left, the girl who cleaned my hut.

One night I lay on my couch thinking over the events of the past few hours and feeling quite unable to sleep. That day had shown me quite definitely which way the wind was blowing. One of the men, emboldened by the urges of the Witch Doctor, had ventured to shake his fist in my face. Another, on being told to leave the entrance to my hut, where he had been prowling about for half an hour, answered with a derisive grimace. These indications led me to believe that the storm was indeed about to break.

In spite of my wakeful state I suppose that I must have drifted gradually off into unconsciousness, because I awoke with a start, to find that it was still some hours before dawn, for the faintest chink of pale moonlight penetrated my thatched walls. As I sat up on my couch of skins, wondering what had awakened me, I became conscious of a strange feeling in the air, an uncanny element that was summoning me outside. I thought that I could hear the sound of prowling animals in the bush. This unknown force seemed to be coming nearer and nearer, drawing at my will-power with baleful intent. I imagined that I could see black faces leering at me with a wild, revolting madness, and I rushed outside.

There in the clearing I found that the Witch Doctor had summoned a ritual dance without my bidding. A small cluster of blacks were gathered round him and he stood in the centre. In the silver stream of moonlight which flooded the open space I saw him brandishing his broad sacrificial knife. His teeth had been filed to sharp points, always a sign that there was something peculiarly diabolical afoot, and there was a snarl of hatred and contempt upon his face. Before him, crouched on the earth with bowed head, was the figure of the one woman who had not been afraid to work for me, the girl who cleaned my hut.

For a minute I could not understand the significance of the scene which was being enacted before me, and then all at once the full hideous meaning penetrated my brain. Quite forgetting that my

commands were now no longer obeyed without question, I rushed up to the Witch Doctor and wrested the knife from his grasp. At the same time I shouted in as loud a voice as I could for a halt to be made in the diabolical proceedings.

I suppose that I must have looked somewhat startling as I stood there in the clearing, bathed in moonlight and brandishing the sacrificial knife in my hand. At any rate directly the circle of blacks caught sight of me and heard my voice they turned and fled shrieking to the safety of their huts. The girl huddled on the ground also rose and crept away. Only the Witch Doctor, bereft of his weapon and with his face distorted with rage, was left to confront me.

When the hubbub had died down and I asked him the meaning of the business which I had just interrupted, his answer, although given sullenly, sounded almost convincing. Only his shifting eyes and shuffling feet showed me that he was telling me but part of the truth, and that there was more behind the proceeding than his simple explanation allowed. He had come to the conclusion, he said, that an evil spirit was trying to work me harm. Already it had demanded the death of one of my "wives" and the sickness of another. He had decided, therefore, that only by sacrificing the last and most faithful of them would it be satisfied and cease its wicked work. If it had not been for my untimely intervention, he concluded, he would have accomplished his purpose by now and I would be safe.

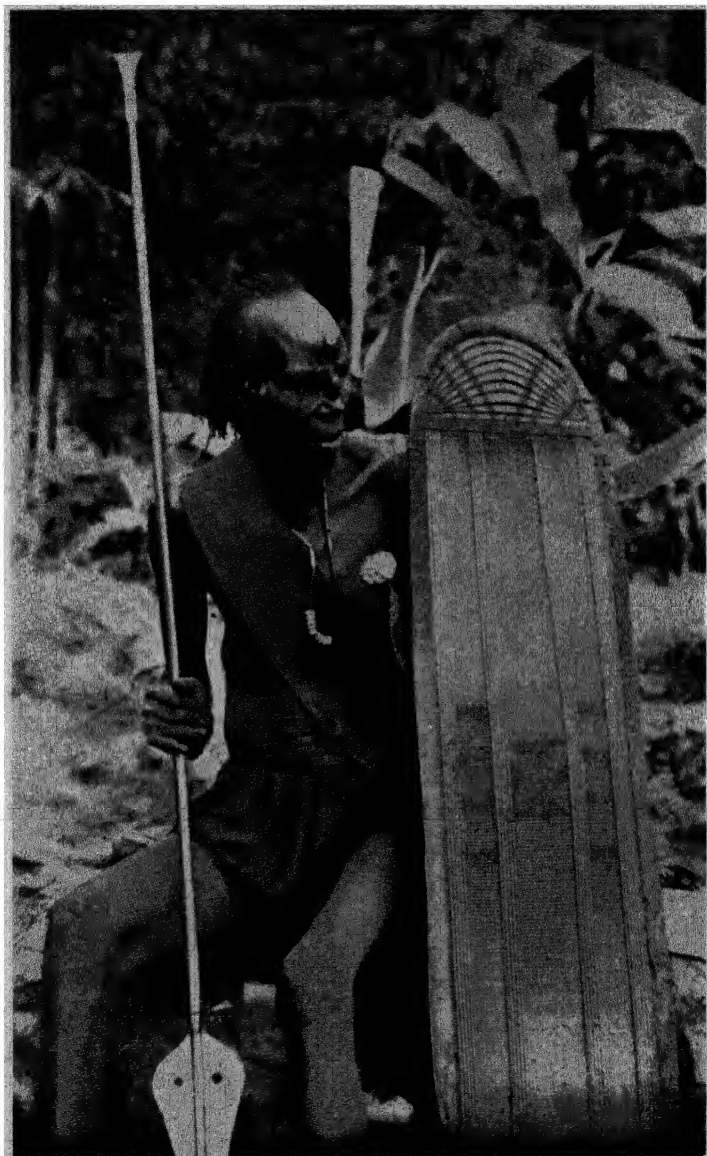
Although the Witch Doctor continued his protestations I knew perfectly well that most of them were lies, that he hated me too much to care about devising anything for my benefit. Yet I was unable to discover the real meaning of the ceremony which I had managed to prevent. Perhaps it was merely a vindictive attempt to kill the one member of the tribe who had shown me any loyalty ; perhaps the Witch Doctor really did believe that by a human sacrifice he would be able to intercede with the gods, not on my behalf but against me. Whatever the reason, I determined that while I was still Chief I would put a stop to all such barbarous practices.

I knew the uselessness of attempting to show the medicine-man the wickedness of his actions : human life was in no way sacred to him. So I tried to play upon his fear, first by demonstrating my superior strength and then by introducing an element of superstition. I went close to him and took him by the arm. I tried to put as much malevolence into my expression as I could, and I bent my face near to his and began to shake him backwards and forwards as a dog worries a rat that it has caught. The amulets which he wore round his neck jingled together, and the inflated bladders behind his ears flapped up and down. Then I started to speak. I told him that human sacrifices were abhorrent to the gods and to me ; that if he continued to conduct them evil spirits would descend in full force upon the tribe, in the form of locusts and other noxious pests. I drew

lurid pictures of rotting cornfields and dying cattle, and of the animal gods in a state of starvation coming through the forest to the village to prey upon their helpless worshippers. Whether or not he was taken in by my imaginary prophecy I cannot tell. At all events, he began to cower and whimper and to assure me that he had never meant to contravene my wishes. He knew perfectly well, he said, that I was the Chief and that he was only a miserable and useless Witch Doctor. He had no wish to anger me or harm me.

I was well aware that the Witch Doctor's penitence was only a blind, that as soon as he regained his confidence and composure he would begin his campaign against me with increased hate. But I could think of no way of keeping him permanently under my thumb, short of imprisoning him, a procedure which the rest of the tribe would never countenance. I decided that the only thing to do was to keep always on the alert and foil every attempt which he made to depose me.

With luck on my side I might perhaps have fought successfully against the wiles of the Witch Doctor. The victory which I had gained over him on the night of the projected sacrifice did much to restore my prestige, and the women at any rate seemed grateful for my intervention on behalf of one of their sex and no longer shunned my presence in quite such a marked manner. If it had not been for Fate, who continued to forsake me, I might once more have risen in the estimation of my subjects to the eminence of a god. As it



(By Courtesy of the R.B.M.U.)

ARMED FOR BATTLE

was, there occurred the worst thing that could possibly have happened to me—I fell ill.

I awoke a few days later with the strangest feeling of lassitude. When I tried to get up my legs refused to bear me and I sank back on to my primitive couch exhausted. One minute I was icy cold, and a sensation of numbness seemed to be stealing over me. But directly I drew the leopard skins around me and huddled shivering among them I became boiling hot and my skin felt as though it were on fire. I felt sick and tired and my mouth was parched. I knew then, as I lay tossing on the floor of the dark, airless hut, that I must be suffering from some sort of jungle fever.

To her great surprise, when my serving-girl came to sweep out the floor, she found her master still inside, lying listlessly on the bed. Instead of running away, however, and whispering the news to the rest of the village, as I am sure all the other women would have done, she came close to me and inquired timidly if there was anything that she could do. Too ill to marvel at this unusual graciousness and kindness on the part of a native woman, I bade her fetch me a calabash of fresh water, and with a little scraping bow she scuttled away.

All that day I lay in the hut, tossing and turning, alternately shivering with cold and burning with fever. At times I must have been delirious, for I began to imagine things. I re-lived the terrible months I had spent in the Place of the Gods ; for one awful moment I thought that I was being

thrown to the crocodiles. But when I came to myself I found that I was still in the hut, with the black girl bending over me with a gourd of water. She was constantly by my side, administering to my needs and trying to relieve my suffering. She brought me bitter herbs from the forest to chew in an attempt to cure my sickness; she offered me fruits and berries and a few mealie cakes. But I was unable to eat. All I wanted was long draughts of water and to be left alone. Towards evening I managed to drift into a restless doze, only to be awakened by a confused murmur outside and a rustling sound. Someone was entering the hut. Painfully raising my head, I saw that it was the Witch Doctor.

He came hopping over to me, clutching in his hand the dried-up thigh-bone which he always carried as a sort of magician's wand. He had hung round his neck more charms and fetiches than I had ever seen him wear before, and he continually touched them, as though to reassure himself of their power to ward off the evil spirit which had invaded this hut of sickness. He was, as I have already said, a terribly emaciated man of only medium height, but this evening he had put on a tall headdress of coloured wools and feathers, and to my fevered imagination he seemed to tower over me as I lay helpless on the couch. Suddenly I began to wonder if after all Fate had saved me from so many terrible dangers only to deliver me up to the hatred and jealousy of the devil who stood before me.

I shall never know why the Witch Doctor did not then and there plunge his knife into my heart. He must have known that I was quite powerless to prevent him. For some reason, however, he had decided to bide his time. When he had stood silently for some time, looking down at me and fingering his talismans, he suddenly let out the most violent flood of invective that I have ever heard. He accused me of being a cheat and a humbug, of deceiving the village into thinking that I was a great god, when all the time I was an impostor. They had made me their deity and their Chief, he babbled on, and now a greater god than I had appeared, had struck down myself and my wives, and I was powerless to prevent him. How was it possible for the tribe to have for Chief a man who fell at the first onslaught with a hostile spirit?

So the evil little man went on cackling over me, dancing up and down in his rage and excitement and flourishing his bones. I heard only about a quarter of what he said: partly because he gabbled out his words so fast that I lost many of them, and partly because I was in a state of semi-consciousness most of the time. One remark which he made, however, did penetrate my fever-dulled brain. Just before he left he bent down and pushed his face close to mine, so that I was forced to see the full hideousness of his painted and mutilated countenance. Then he literally hissed out his words at me, making much the same sound as an angry swan.

"There will be the choosing of a new Chief at the next moon," he said. "The white man is deposed." Then with a last leaping dance around my couch he disappeared from my side. A stealthy rustle told me that he had left the hut.

The relief to be rid of such a nauseating creature was so great that at first I refused to contemplate the full meaning of his words. But recalling them after some time, I was suddenly aware of their significance. If the tribe was choosing a new Chief before the month was up, what was to become of me, their old one? I remembered tales which the Witch Doctor had told me, of the depositions of tribal leaders. Sometimes, if the Chief was old and blind and the tribe decided that he was unfit to rule he was left in the forest to die. Sometimes, if he lost the throne in a fight with a younger man, the victor threw him to death among the crocodiles. Whatever his fate, death was always at the end of it, whether by slow starvation in the lonely depths of the jungle or by being torn piecemeal by the cruel fangs of the huge and ravenous saurians.

This then was the hideous situation in which I found myself. Only a few days ago I had been respected and revered, almost worshipped. The whole tribe had regarded me as their rightful Chief. I had set myself to work, teaching them the little things I could to improve their lot, and they had responded almost gratefully. Even the Witch Doctor had professed allegiance. Yet now I was lying in my hut, stricken with fever and

knowing that my life was in mortal danger ; and all because Fate had decreed that misfortune should come to myself and two of the people most closely associated with my doings. I knew, of course, that the feeling against me was all directly caused by the machinations of the Witch Doctor, that it was he who had played on the superstitious fears of the natives. But at the same time I was well aware that the novelty of my rule would not, in any case, have lasted for ever. The blacks, in their childish way, would have tired of my reforms and innovations in the same way that a child tires of a new toy, and would have cast me aside without compunction directly they found something else to amuse them.

The blow had fallen, nevertheless, much earlier than I had anticipated and at a time when I was neither fit nor ready to contend against it. Lying on my couch, tired and sick, and aching with the fever, I realised that a successful escape was the only solution to the appalling situation. Then and there I made up my mind to get away. In spite of my sickness, I determined that before the month was over and the new Chief appointed I would have made a dash for freedom. If all went well I would be far away from the Witch Doctor and his evil plans.

CHAPTER XIX

I PLAN MY ESCAPE

THE one member of the village who still remained loyal to me, my faithful serving-woman, was a girl of about fifteen years. For a Gaboon native she was not bad-looking : her nose was not as broad and flat, nor her lips as thick as usual. Moreover, I soon found during my days of sickness that she cherished a blind affection for me and was my obedient slave. These feelings of gratitude and love which she displayed towards me, qualities which generally seem to be entirely absent from the character of the average black man and woman, made me come to regard her almost as a friend. Had it not been for her constant care and attention when I was in the throes of the fever I fully believe that my bones would even now be rotting in some stagnant reptile-infested swamp of the Gaboon country. As it was, the nourishing food which she gathered in the forest, and the gourds of water which she brought to cool my aching forehead and parched tongue, did much to restore me to comparative health.

She and I, too, had one great bond in common : our overwhelming dislike of the Witch Doctor. I

did not think it would be wise to show her how fervently I agreed with her in this matter, for fear lest the evil monster himself should hear of it and in revenge strike sooner than he had intended, but the knowledge of it cheered me up considerably. I realised that there was at least one being who was on my side and against him. She was, I felt, the only person in the whole tribe whom I could trust in any way, and I determined to seek her assistance in planning my escape.

Throughout the long months of captivity that I had spent in the hands of the African natives I had always visualised the day when I would manage to escape from their clutches and find my way back to my Gorilla friends. Hope had never deserted me, and although there were times when the idea of a dash for freedom receded further and further into the back of my mind, the least little reminder of those early days in the forest would send the whole memory of them rushing back. Bo-Bo had for a time contented me, despite the hideous conditions in which I lived with him, but when he died I was left alone, with no animals for company. Often I would wake up at night or in the early morning, thinking that I could hear the call of my friends and the sound of them crashing through the undergrowth, and again and again I would vow to make a real effort to return to them.

But now, when escape had proved essential if I was to remain alive, I realised the absurdity of attempting to live once more in the company of the great anthropoids, at any rate for a time.

The privations and tortures which I had undergone, and the fever which was even now sapping my strength and vitality, made it impossible for me to think of consorting with the apes. One playful buffet from the smallest of them and I would be knocked on the ground unconscious. One false step in climbing a tree, a mistake which I might easily make in my weak state, and I would crash to the earth and probably break my neck, as one of my "wives" had done before me. Regretfully, therefore, I made up my mind that if I did indeed manage to escape from the village I would return to my home in Malta, in whose cooler climate I could recover my previous health and energy. I set about making my plans accordingly.

On the night after the Witch Doctor had visited me in my hut and given me the news of my proposed deposition, my native girl was sitting on her haunches outside, chanting an African song. It was a monotonous repetition of different sounds, but not unpleasing. I beckoned her into the hut and bade her sit down beside me as I wished to talk to her. She obeyed rather timidly, as though she did not consider it right for a slave to be seated before her master, and I began to outline my scheme.

I told her that a long way across the forest down the Gaboon River, where the traders came from, there was a land of great white chiefs like myself to which I wanted to return. The Witch Doctor, I informed her, wanted me to stay in the village

and was going to make it very difficult for me to leave. Nevertheless, I was determined to go, even if it cost me my life. Would she help me ?

I had expected either a flat and sullen refusal or a timid acquiescence to my request, and was totally unprepared for the mixture of stubbornness and deference with which she answered. Yes, she said, she would do all she could to help me to escape provided that I would allow her to accompany me ! I told her that it was quite impossible to do as she wished, that she would be unhappy among the white men, that she would miss the fellow members of the tribe. I informed her that as soon as our disappearance was discovered the villagers would come chasing through the forest for the runaways, and, if they caught us, would almost certainly put us to death. But in spite of my excuses and explanations she was inexorable : she was coming with me. So, in the face of such staunch opposition, I decided to make the best of it and see if she was still so eager to accompany me when the actual time for departure came.

We discussed our plans at length. The most important thing, I told her, was to watch the comings and goings of the Witch Doctor and his warriors. If possible we must choose for our escape a day when most of the village men would be absent on some expedition or festival, so that there would be no one of importance to see us go and our disappearance would not be discovered for several hours. The girl, who entered into the conspiracy almost as though it were a game,

suggested that her mother might be entrusted with this task, as she, being a married woman, would have more opportunity of watching the movements of the warriors. If her mother was to be trusted, I told the girl, by all means let her come to my aid.

So our plans were laid. I arranged that the girl should make a collection of nourishing roots and herbs and hide them ready for the journey. Water, too, in calabashes was put ready. But what worried me most of all was the trek which we would have to make through the forest. I was convinced that we should be followed, and it was essential that we should find our way as rapidly as possible to the Gaboon River. Once we became lost in the wild mazes of the African jungle I knew that our lives would be worth very little, yet how was I to discover the right track that led to the river, or at any rate to one of its tributaries? I knew the general direction, of course, but even that was of little help when pushing through the undergrowth in almost total darkness. In this matter, however, my confederate proved invaluable.

Native women in Africa have societies and cults among themselves as strange and secret as those to which only the men may belong. They have their own ceremonies and rituals, and should any man dare to witness one of these he stands little chance of escape from the shrieking hordes of Furies whose privacy he has violated. They rush upon him, biting and scratching and trying almost

to tear him limb from limb, and he has to defend himself as best he can with his bare hands, for no other man is allowed to come to his aid.

The women of my tribe had a secret society of their own, of whose inner workings I was, of course, completely ignorant, but which I knew necessitated long sojourns into the forest about every two months. One of these expeditions, so my native girl informed me, was due to take place in a few days' time, and as luck would have it the objective of the members was a sacred tree many miles away from the village, in the direction, roughly, of the Gaboon River. The suggestion of the girl was that she should take careful note of the route followed by the women, in order that we might take the same one when we set forth on our journey. Once we knew the way, our going would be infinitely easier and we would stand a much better chance of eluding any possible followers and facilitating our escape.

Our schemes proceeded without a hitch. Gradually my strength returned to me, but I decided to remain as much in the hut as possible so that the Witch Doctor, thinking that I was still in the grip of the fever, might relax his guard a little. I knew only too well that as soon as his suspicions were aroused he would take no risks, but have me thrown immediately to the crocodiles. From time to time, usually towards evening, I would open my eyes with a start, to find him standing beside me, but although he muttered to himself and fingered his talismans he never attempted any

violence. He rarely spoke to me, even though in the days of my Chieftainship he had been, for a native, almost communicative and had given me a great deal of information about the life and customs of the tribe. Now he just stood and looked at me, and then, after a little, vanished through the opening of the hut.

Having at last definitely made up my mind to leave the native village, I realised all at once how irksome the past months had been. The constant repetition that formed the life of the community, a life that had neither the glorious freedom of an animal existence in the forest nor the comforts and luxuries of the civilisation which I hated ; the everlasting attempts to keep the blacks in a good humour and amused ; the discontent of the warriors and the hostility of the Witch Doctor, who was ever stirring up some sort of strife to keep his position : all these things made me long to get as far away as possible from the village and the tribe. I realised that I had whetted their appetites, that I had given them a taste for civilisation, but I did not regret it, nor do I even to this day. The innovations which I taught them were all efforts to improve their lot by natural means : I brought them no artificial tools from the coast, nor did I attempt to teach them to build machines. All I did was to try to make them think and invent for themselves, and in doing this I believe that I did confer some little good on the tribe while I was there.

Meanwhile my serving-girl had departed with

her fellows on their secret mission. Before she left she brought me a store of fruits and corncakes to eat during her two days' absence, and bending down close to me she whispered that she had learned some important news from her mother. The day after the women were due to return from their pilgrimage to the sacred tree the warriors and youths, as a sort of childish retaliation for being excluded from the affairs of the women, were also planning a sojourn into the forest. They would be leaving late at night, after an afternoon and evening spent in dancing and drinking, and they would be marching in a direction almost exactly opposite to that taken by the women.

This then would be our chance. While the men were indulging in their orgy of rhythm and intoxication we would attempt to steal away from the village out into the forest.

CHAPTER XX

FLIGHT THROUGH THE FOREST

DURING those two days when my fellow-conspirator was away from the village with the rest of the womenfolk, I was in a fever of impatience. I longed for some way of occupying my time until she returned, and yet there was nothing at all that I could do, except lie quietly and nurse my strength for the great day. I lived in constant fear lest the Witch Doctor should in some way get wind of my proposed flight, or for some other reason should decide that it was time to end my life. Whenever I heard a footfall outside the hut I imagined that it was he, coming to drag me out to my death. I could not decide whether it would be better to go with him quietly, and then attempt a break for freedom in the clearing, or to grapple with him then and there in the gloomy hut. Either way would, I knew, end almost certainly in capture and a horrible fate.

Nothing happened, however. While my native girl was absent no one entered the hut or attempted to molest me when I went outside for air. The village seemed strangely still, whether because of the absence of the giggling and chattering women or because there was something of excitement

brewing I could not tell. The few warriors which I did see, lazing about the compound, rose quickly and walked away if they saw me approaching, or else pretended to be too deeply absorbed in their talk to take any notice of their erstwhile Chief ; although there was a time, not so many weeks ago, when they would have come running up to me at once for amusement and instruction. The Witch Doctor, I reflected, as I watched their furtive movements to shun me, must wield even greater power than I had realised to make the natives change so absolutely in their attitude towards me.

At last on the third morning, as I lay in my hut, I heard the sound of yells and shrill screams outside, mingled with the pattering of many naked feet. The women had returned ! Impatiently I waited for the coming of my confederate, but for a long time she never came. I could hear the high-pitched voices of her fellows ; cautiously peeping through the door I could see them setting once more about their familiar tasks of grinding corn and weaving mats and baskets. They all seemed very pleased with themselves and highly delighted with the success of their expedition. But nowhere could I catch a glimpse of the one face I sought, the face of my faithful servant. What could have happened to her ? I began to get anxious, to visualise all the dreadful misfortunes that might have occurred. If she did not appear before the following evening I should have to set forth on my adventures alone, and the

thought filled me with dismay. Previously I had done all I could to persuade her to remain in the village. Now I realised that only with her help would I be able to find my way to the Gaboon River. Surely she would come?

All that day I waited for her. Never before have I longed so much to see the face of a black woman. I was afraid to go outside and ask her whereabouts lest I should appear too curious; and at any rate I knew that if I attempted any conversation with the womenfolk they would have fled shrieking at my approach. All I could do was to remain in the hut as patiently as possible and hope that she would come. At last, late in the evening, when the clearing was already flooded with darkness, she came.

She entered the hut stealthily, as though afraid of being seen, and ran over to me. Through her excited jabberings I soon gathered the reason for her late appearance: she had been scouting round for news and had discovered that the Witch Doctor intended me to be present at the festival on the morrow. As far as she knew he had decided that after the orgy of dancing and drinking I was to be taken through the forest by the band of warriors and thrown to the ravenous gods. This was indeed a blow to all our hopes and plans: if I was to be made to take part in the forthcoming ceremony I would be the cynosure of all eyes and would find it impossible to slip away unobserved. The only possible way out of the difficulty was for us to make our get-away this very night, evading

the guards as best we might under cover of the darkness.

When I communicated my decision to the native girl she agreed immediately : as far as she was concerned the sooner we left the village and set out on our way to the land of the white men the better she would be pleased. She was all eagerness to be gone. Busily, and as quickly as she could, she began to make preparations for our departure, gathering the food which she had been collecting for the past week and placing it in a sort of pannier woven of rushes. I, meanwhile, tried to devise a means of leaving the hut without being seen by the two warriors who usually guarded it, and in this matter the girl again proved herself to be a valuable ally. She suggested that we should make a hole in the straw that thatched the walls at the back of the hut and so creep out unobserved. Two things stood in our favour : my hut was a little way removed from the rest of the encampment and nearer to the edge of the clearing, so that it would be comparatively easy to slip into the obscurity of the dark forest ; also, the warriors were under the impression that I was still in the throes of the fever and so had relaxed their vigilance a little. I could hear them murmuring together outside the entrance to the hut and, as far as I could make out, playing a variation of the game that I had taught them.

It seemed almost too easy. Pulling out strand after strand of the thatching, I soon had a hole big enough to let myself through. Behind me, the

basket of provisions hanging from her shoulders, came the girl. As noiselessly as we could we stole across the open space which separated us from the friendly gloom of the trees, and then for a moment, before plunging into the tangled undergrowth, I stopped to listen. Back in the village all was quiet save for the muffled throb of a tom-tom, to whose insistent rhythm the Witch Doctor was no doubt making his revolting preparations for the forthcoming festival. Evidently our escape was so far unperceived. Calling the girl to me, I whispered that everything now depended on her ; only through her help could I hope to reach the safety of the Gaboon River. So I set off, following her along a roughly trodden path, leaving behind me the place where I had lived so long and endured so much, the magic and mysterious message of the drum still sounding in my ears.

For many days we travelled almost continuously. Now that I was free from all man-made laws and encumbrances, I felt my old zest for the jungle-life returning. I would have liked to have taken to the trees, the mode of travel which I had often adopted before to avoid the clinging briars below, but my companion could not accompany me. Unlike the men, the womenfolk of the Gaboon are not good climbers and prefer to make their way through the dense undergrowth. Our store of provisions soon came to an end, but that did not bother us. We gathered all the food that we required as we went on our way.

We encountered very little animal life on our

journey ; presumably the presence of a horde of women pressing through the forest only a day previously had scared all the creatures from the vicinity. For once, however, I was glad of the lack of wild beasts, knowing that the girl would be terrified of them and might, in her fear, run off the track and lose her way. So far she had led me along as though absolutely confident that we were proceeding in the right direction. I had no means of telling whether this was indeed the case, but I judged it best to follow her without question.

Having met with no large animals, therefore, I was surprised to hear on the second morning of our journey the sound of moving bodies away on the track behind us. Thinking that it might be some ravenous leopard, disappointed of its prey and hot on our scent, or even a friendly Gorilla, I climbed a tall tree to try to catch a glimpse of it. For a time, gazing out over the waving fronds of green foliage, I could see no sign of movement, nor could I hear anything from my high perch. Not a creature seemed to be stirring. Then, all at once, through the trees in the direction from which we had come, I caught sight of a bright red feather and a flash of sunlight reflected on a piece of metal. It was a band of warriors in full war-paint ; our disappearance had come to light and they were searching for us !

Hurriedly descending the tree, I broke the news to my companion. Directly she heard that the warriors were on our track all her courage deserted her. She grew panic-stricken, visualising the

probable punishment that would be meted out to her if she were captured, and this despite the fact that when I had described this very eventuality to her at the beginning of my plans, she had completely disregarded my words. She was, in fact, all for giving herself up to the approaching band and relying on what little mercy they possessed to save her life.

I did all I could to persuade her that there was as yet no need for such a drastic and final action, that with care and caution we might manage to evade the members of her tribe and continue our escape. At last, sullen and trembling, she agreed to climb a tree and attempt to hide. The tree which I chose was a big one, with low-hanging, bushy foliage, and covered with a thick mesh of lianas. Once seated in the highest fork to which the girl dared ascend, we pulled the leaves and creepers round us and found that we were completely screened off from the track below. Looking down we could see nothing but a sea of greenery, dappled with light where it was struck by the penetrating rays of the sun. For a time we could hear nothing, until at last there came the sound of feet, the beating of drums, and the crash and crackle of men pushing their way through the forest. The noises came nearer and nearer. Peering cautiously through my green curtain I saw the warriors passing beneath me. There must have been about forty of them, all bearing tall spears and skin shields and all wearing head-dresses and necklets of coloured feathers and carved horns. They

marched in single file, looking, as far as I could see, neither to the right nor the left. As they passed below, the girl crouched close to me and began to tremble violently : I feared every minute that she would swarm down the tree and reveal herself to the men. But luckily she stayed where she was, and the warriors passed by unaware of the nearness of their prey. Gradually the sound of their going faded away into the forest.

So we made our way through the jungle towards the Gaboon River. The journey took many days and nights, so that eventually I lost all count of time. Always we appeared to be followed. Time after time I heard the sound of trampling feet and the beat of tom-toms, and at the first warning of these hostile sounds the girl and I would perch ourselves in a leafy tree and hide until the danger was over. Strangely enough, the enemy never thought of searching above their heads, and so we never came into actual contact with any natives, although we caught many glimpses of them. I was surprised to find that my escort really did seem to know her way through the forest. We had long ago passed the site of the sacred tree, and the track beyond it was quite unknown to her. Yet she led the way with unerring instinct, as though completely certain of the whereabouts of the Gaboon River.

At last we arrived there. Early one afternoon it seemed to me that the forest was gradually becoming less dense and the ground underfoot more swampy. The trees grew further apart and

allowed the light to penetrate. Then suddenly, almost with one step, we left the forest behind us. Ahead I could see the glint of water, and running towards it I saw that we were on the bank of a little river, not big enough to be the Gaboon itself, but almost certainly a tributary. We had only to follow the stream eventually to come out into the main channel.

I decided that progress would be much quicker and easier if we made it by water instead of by land. The ground on the shores of the stream was a continuous marsh, which would necessitate many detours. Whereas, if we actually navigated the stream itself we could not possibly miss the way, nor would the transit be so difficult. Accordingly we set about building a crude raft.

Once again my companion proved her usefulness. Native women are very good workers once they have been told what to do and how to do it, and provided that they are watched all the time. In six or seven hours the raft was completed. It was composed of everything buoyant upon which we could lay our hands, chiefly logs of wood and sticks bound together with stout creepers, and by the time that it was finished it was far larger than I had at first intended. This defect, however, was an asset in a way, for it ensured the ability of the raft to bear our combined weight. Having built our vessel we proceeded to equip it for the voyage by collecting as many fruits and berries as we could. The river bank was singularly devoid of plantains, bananas or any other fruit trees, but we

At length we reached Gaboon, a comparatively flourishing station at the mouth of the river, and here I began almost at once to make arrangements for my homeward journey. Now that I had definitely decided to abandon my search for Gorilla and to return to Malta, knowing full well that I was not in a fit state of health to remain alone in a land where the weakest must always go to the wall, I was all eagerness to be gone before I should change my mind. There was a freighter in the harbour which I discovered would be arriving in Malta after a devious route round the African coast, and immediately I went on board and asked to see the captain.

He was a Frenchman. When I explained my business and told him that although I had no money, my father would suitably reward him when we arrived in Malta, he smiled sceptically. I suppose he must have thought that I was attempting to get a cheap trip home. Catching sight of myself in a mirror, I was not exactly surprised at his attitude: it would have taken a very credulous man to believe that I had in Malta a father wealthy enough to pay for the voyage. Nevertheless, after a great deal of explanation, and after the Dutch hunters had been brought to corroborate at any rate part of my story, he agreed to take me on board, provided that I undertook to do a little work. So the deal was made, and within forty-eight hours we were sailing out of the Gaboon harbour, leaving Gaboon behind us.

Standing in the stern of the boat, I watched the

shore glide slowly past. Back there, in the secret places of the vast primeval forest, I had achieved the greatest ambition of my life : I had become a brother to the great apes. Nothing, neither the tortures which I had suffered in the native village, nor the horror of the Place of the Gods, could dim the happiness of my sojourn among my monkey friends. Suddenly, in response to an inner urge which I could not resist, and no doubt to the amazement of the sailors, I threw back my head and gave the old familiar cry. And as the sound died away across the waters I imagined that I could hear an answering call from the depths of the jungle, a last call of friendship from the land of the Gorilla.

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